

ENHANCING A CULTURE OF WELCOMING  
AT THE CHURCH WITH A BIG HEART

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of  
Drew University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

ENHANCING A CULTURE OF WELCOMING

AT THE CHURCH WITH A BIG HEART

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Antioch Baptist Church, New York, NY

Antioch Baptist Church is a non-traditional Baptist church that was organized in November 1977 under the leadership of the late pastor and my father, the Reverend Dr. Alfloyd Alston in the village of Harlem. In 2005, I became the current senior pastor and endeavored to continue the godly legacy of the church. Because of the church's reputation of love toward all people with a willingness to give, Antioch is affectionately known as "the church with a big heart." The church is a ministry with the goal to meet the needs of the people within the community through childcare, aftercare, healthcare, and most importantly, the Word of God.

Antioch has always been a warm and inviting church that consists of disciples within our community as well as the tri-state area. People are drawn to the ministry because of the Word, good food, and our local community involvement. Over the past two decades, Harlem has experienced an increase in tourism; consequently, more people visit Antioch to hear gospel music and experience a traditional Baptist worship service. In recent years, visitor feedback has revealed that the congregation is perceived as

welcoming and receptive to short-term visitors of other nationalities. Even though many visitors depart before the service concludes—they remain for an hour—we strive to be caring hosts.

My professional project for the Doctor of Ministry examines the degree to which Antioch Baptist Church—the church with a big heart—is really creating a culture of welcome for our disciples and visiting guests. The project has benefited the congregation and the leadership by compelling us to examine the meanings of Christian hospitality and how we treat fellow members and international guests.

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To all the volunteers who participated in the focus groups, bible study, and site visits at World Changers and Ministerio Internacional En el Nombre de Jesus, I thank you. To the ushers of Antioch Baptist Church, thank you for your unconditional love towards me even during challenging times. To my spiritual sisters, Dr. Lucille Farrell-Scott, Dr. Patricia Morris, Dr. Zavette Smallwood who inspired me to get my doctorate,

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To my children Candyce and Joshua, thank you for being the best children. We faced some difficult times during this season but your faith never wavered. You have been a source of strength for me. I love you dearly.

To my dad, the late Rev. Dr. Alfloyd Alston, I truly miss you. Thank you for being the example of hospitality a real model that I could follow. Every time you said, “Now why are you going to school? You go girl,” you encouraged me. To my children Candyce and Joshua, you will be able to stand on my shoulders and receive your doctorate. Last but certainly not least to my amazing husband who is the priest, prophet, and provider of our home, Oliver W. Adkins, Jr. thank you for being by my side during this journey. We know that 2018 is the best year ever. To God be the Glory. Amen!

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Antioch Baptist Church is located in the heart of Harlem. During the past two decades, some of the most overlooked neighborhoods in Harlem have become major attractions for tourists seeking to hear gospel music. Tourists come by foot or on tour buses to black churches where gospel music is prominent. Many are seeking to experience gospel music as seen on television or in the movies, as entertainment. Journalist Andrew Sheivachman noted that, “Gentrification has made more New York City neighborhoods more appealing to many visitors, bringing tourists and businesses catering to tourists to neighborhoods that weren’t used to them. In 2014 tourists spent more than \$81 billion when visiting New York City.”<sup>1</sup> In churches as well as famous soul food restaurants such as Sylvia’s you can find long lines of tourists waiting to enter and experience a touch of Harlem.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Sheivachman, “How Gentrification Powers New York City’s Tourism Industry: The Complicated Relationship Between Tourism and the U.S.A.’s Most Popular Urban Destination,” *Skift*, January 25, 2017, accessed March 7, 2017, <https://skift.com/new-york-city-tourism-and-gentrification>.

Gentrification has had a major impact on the church and the community.

Unfortunately, many of the churches are being forced to close. Another journalist noted:

Churches are losing members but gaining profits from gentrification. Nearly two dozen churches have either closed or been sold to developers for more than \$50 million over the last decade. The churches often sell because of a combination of factors including dwindling memberships, high maintenance costs and the lure of millions of dollars from maintenance costs and the lure of millions of dollars from developers ready to buy in Harlem.<sup>1</sup>

In speaking with some of my colleagues, from diverse denominations, many of their churches are failing to thrive in Harlem. The competition of live streaming, Christian television, and social media are keeping people home, and they no longer feel they have to fellowship at the local churches. The tourism boom and the commercialism it brings is off-putting to some regular attendees, forcing pastors to respond as illustrated by news reports:

The neighborhood churches have become popular tourist attractions for visitors from all over the world who want to listen to soulful gospel music at a black church service. The growing crowds are causing some problems. To preserve the sanctity of the service, pastors are struggling to enforce strict rules of conduct. Visitors are not allowed to take photos or leave during the sermon. The visitors are filling church pews that would otherwise remain empty.<sup>2</sup>

Some of my colleagues who are facing the aforementioned problem often have congregants older that are unfortunately dying or relocating which has caused a lack of church growth. To further compound the issues, they have older buildings that are in dire

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<sup>1</sup> Gustavo Solis, "MAP: Harlem's Black Churches Cash in on Gentrification," *DNAInfo*, October 9, 2017, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20171009/central-harlem/gentrification-harlem-churches-selling-out-or-surviving>.

<sup>2</sup> NBC 4 New York, "Harlem Churches See Gospel Tourist Boom on Sundays," March 11, 2012, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/gospel-churches-tourism-crowds-harlem-142256925.html>.

need of repairs to meet today's building codes. The churches are not generating enough money to pay the bills through tithes and offering, therefore they have to rely on the donations provided by tourists to help support the ministry. The irony of this is that the tourists who are bringing in the revenue to keep the church operational are the very same people many of the pastors and congregants believe are causing trouble. Most pastors would rather the pews to be filled with members instead of tourists.

I am the pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Harlem and we have also experienced this boom in tourism during the past two decades. Our church has been fortunate enough to stay operational without relying on tourism revenue. Fortunately, Antioch Baptist Church does not have a contentious relationship with the tourists. The church "with the big heart" generally welcomes enthusiastically. Despite this, there is a degree of frustration from congregants because of the disruption the tourists cause during Sunday services.

The tourists, henceforth identified as, "international guests," come to Antioch from Spain, Argentina, Uruguay, and France. They hear about our ministry through word of mouth, the internet, and the tour guides. Since we do not allow tour guides to bring tourists to the church, these visitors often arrive at least an hour before service begins in order to find a seat. This has led the ushers at Antioch to feel frustrated with the long line of eager tourists whom they believe are there as spectators looking to be entertained. Many of the guests are excited to experience the service but some unfortunately are rude and manipulative to our ushers. The behavior from a few of the tourists has caused some of our ushers to become unwelcoming and sometimes dismissive to our international guests.

Part of the ushers' frustration is also due to language barriers. Many guests speak limited English but understand the language when we speak slowly. This often prevents our ushers from fully engaging and effectively communicating with our guests. The ushers feel that many of our international guests do not revere the service, and the ushers are offended when the visitors treat the service as a performance by acting as spectators at a game, taking pictures, and leaving after the music and before the sermon begins.

To mitigate the problem, the ushers reserve the last four rows in the rear of the sanctuary as well as two rows in the vestibule to prevent the international guests from disrupting the service upon departure prior to the service ending. We have also assigned an usher to direct our international guests when they leave.

These issues have been the subject of many conversations among the congregants and ministerial team. Some of our members have expressed their concerns not only regarding the lack of hospitality towards the tourists but also our local guests. In some ways it is intriguing to hear congregants talk about hospitality. I, too, am also having a conversation going on in my mind regarding Antioch and hospitality. I ponder these questions:

1. How do we handle the influx of international guests?
2. Are we more concerned about them coming to hear gospel music, and is it possible that they can come expecting one thing and leave understanding the message of salvation?
3. Can one learn how to be hospitable?

One of the young adult members made a comment about the users:

I think the ushers are rude and disrespectful. They are very mean at times. They don't know how to speak to people. I have seen them push some of the

international guests and speak harshly to them. I have known people to leave and not return due to the ushers. I witnessed another incident where one of the ushers was literally walking through the rows that the international guests were sitting in and policing them. She even hit one of them because his knee was on the back of the seat in front of him.

Our international guests have also shared their views regarding their experience at Antioch. While I am clear that many of our international guests may share different beliefs, I also recognize that this boom in tourism is a means by which visitors can experience the welcoming presence of Jesus. Here is a comment that one of our guests posted on the TripAdvisor.

Undoubtedly the big problem is that something as personal as a religious service becomes a tourist spectacle. The line to enter the church is huge and although starts at 10:30 the capacity is limited. We could get into the second round and watch the last 15 minutes of trade. (And we arrived very early to the place) Personally expecting something more intimate, and logically, it was like queuing up the Empire State Building. Even feel you're invading a very personal space.<sup>3</sup>

Hospitality has been paramount in our ministry since the inception of Antioch. At present, approximately 97% of the members of Antioch Baptist Church are African American, and there is a growing number of local ethnic groups attending our worship services. I am concerned that we are allowing our present uneasiness to draw us away from our foundational norm of welcome in which our late pastor, Reverend Alloyd Alston incorporated into our ministry. Reverend Alston had a welcoming and inviting spirit and believed that everyone should be treated like family when they walked through those church doors.

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<sup>3</sup> Trip Advisor, "Antioch Baptist Church," accessed February 1, 2018 [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d2335318-Reviews-Antioch\\_Baptist\\_Church-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html#REVIEWS](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d2335318-Reviews-Antioch_Baptist_Church-New_York_City_New_York.html#REVIEWS). The aforementioned comments are no longer accessible on the website. While there are some comments still available, the comments referenced cannot be recovered.

### **The Man with a Big Heart**

The late Reverend Dr. Alfloyd Alston, who was also my father, was the organizer of Antioch Baptist Church. Because of his personal experience as a migrant from the South, he understood hospitality. In 1960 in the middle of winter, he came to New York City from a small town called Norlina, North Carolina. He used to tell the story of how he arrived here without a hat on his head or coat on his back, carrying only ten dollars in his pocket. His cousin Grace and her husband showed hospitality by allowing him to stay with them. Grace took him to Second Saint John Baptist Church located on 118th Street in Manhattan where he dedicated his life to Christ and joined that church. The congregation warmly embraced him and the pastor immediately put him to work. He served on the usher board where his passion for hospitality was ignited. Because of his hospitality, people loved to see him standing at the door greeting the parishioners with his warm smile as they entered the church. Hospitality was a part of his life and it was displayed in and outside of the church.

When he became a pastor, it was inevitable that he would organize the church on principles of hospitality. He showed hospitality through his generosity. The ministry was built around his love for God and the scriptures, his love for people, and meals. In those early days, Antioch used to sell barbeque dinners on Lenox Avenue between 143rd and 144th Streets. The purpose of the sale of the barbeque was to raise money so he could buy a church building. During that time, neither he nor the congregation understood the principles of giving tithes and offerings. They named this street corner venue "The Site" where one could smell the flavor of barbeque for several blocks. People would come throughout the entire tri-state area and wait in long lines to

experience southern barbeque ribs and chopped barbeque. Surprisingly, people rarely complained about the wait because of the warm welcome that the members of Antioch were trained to provide. People shared how they waited during the week in anticipation for Saturday to purchase the barbeque as well as the homemade sweet potato pies and coconut cakes. Those who arrived at “The Site” without money were never turned away. My father always had a big heart. He would welcome them and offer a meal free of charge. He was never concerned about being taken advantage of because he lived from a place of abundance, believing God was his source. His love for God, people, and his talent for cooking southern barbeque caused my father’s name to become popular throughout the Harlem community.

When he organized Antioch in 1977, our first service was held in the art gallery of the State Building on 125th Street. Later we found space at the Wilson Major Morris Center on 152nd Street where we held our Sunday morning service. St. John Baptist Church which was located across the street from the Wilson Major Morris Center graciously offered their baptismal pool for baptism and their choir room for prayer service. At the time, Reverend Alston diligently searched for space and was determined that he would not move his congregation into a storefront building.

In 1979, he found what was a dilapidated old A&P Supermarket on 125th Street in Harlem. When he saw the building, there was a witness in his spirit, and he ran up and down the street yelling, “It’s mine! It’s mine!” One of the local business owners inquired about his behavior. After Reverend Alston explained, the merchant asked about his ability to pay for the building. Reverend Alston admitted he had no money. His resources might have been limited, but he understood that with God all things are

possible. The congregation purchased the building for one hundred fifty thousand dollars.

During the renovation, Reverend Alston would sit outside, watching the contractors as they worked to build our church. He formed friendships with people in the community while they walked by, often inviting them to share in the opening and dedication service of our new building. The community was intrigued by his warm hospitality and his sense of humor. The church moved into the new fully-furnished location with thirty-five members. People came from all over the community to witness our first Sunday in the new building, and God moved miraculously. On the first Sunday, the choir and the members marched in on the song, “We’ve Come This Far by Faith.” The church experienced what we called an “and suddenly moment.” The church membership more than doubled that Sunday and continued to increase over the years. Reverend Alston served for twenty-eight years as pastor of Antioch until his death on April 29, 2005. On September 2005, I was officially installed as the senior pastor. When I became the senior pastor, one of my goals was to carry out the traditions of our Christian hospitality throughout our ministry.

### **Statement of Concern**

Antioch Baptist Church has always been known for its hospitality throughout the community whether we are hosting community leaders or providing a service to the neighborhood. I have been the pastor for twelve years, and over the past ten years, we have been given the official motto, “The Church with a Big Heart” by our congregation as well as the community leaders. Lately, I have been concerned that we are not living up to our reputation of hospitality that has embodied the church. Based on the

conversations within the ministry around hospitality, I wanted to see if we were embodying our motto of being “The Church with a Big Heart.”

I convened a Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) by recruiting and requesting volunteers who were members of Antioch Baptist Church. The LAC served as a liaison between myself and the congregation for the purpose of this project. To assist with the project the LAC assisted me by:

1. Creating a focus group and questions for the group.
2. Developing a survey from the results of the focus group asking the church what they thought about the hospitality at Antioch.
3. Assisting with midweek as we helped the congregation to understand Christian Hospitality and “Who are our Neighbors?” through scripture.
4. Becoming a model of hospitality by practicing hospitality in our daily lives at church and at home.
5. Praying

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to assess whether, through hospitality, we are embodying our motto of being “The Church with a Big Heart.” The goal is to deepen and expand hospitality beyond the members of Antioch, teaching them to be welcoming to all congregants and strangers when they enter our church.

### **Timeline of Implementation**

The timeline of this project spanned from February 2017 to April 2017. The project consisted of three components:

1. A six-week one o'clock afternoon and seven o'clock evening Wednesday bible study.
2. A four-week Sunday morning series on hospitality.
3. Visiting two churches, World Changers Church New York, and a Spanish church, Ministerio Internacional En el Nombre de Jesus where the pastors are Dionicio and Ramona Tavarez. The purpose of the visits was to see how these churches involve other languages/races in its service. The LAC and I decided that only the ushers and greeters would attend the services. We did not want to offend anyone by bringing a congregation to evaluate their service. Most of the LAC attended and members of the ushers' and greeters' ministries was encouraged by the LAC to participate.

### **Assessing the Project**

As mentioned above, the project consisted of six weeks of teaching and four weeks of a Sunday teaching series on hospitality at Antioch Baptist Church to enhance the congregation's understanding of hospitality. Traditionally in the black church, the ushers were responsible for hospitality by greeting the parishioners. There was no such thing as a greeter or a hospitality ministry. Even though it was never stated, the ushers were expected to be greeters whose responsibility consisted of keeping order, seating the people, and receiving the offering. Today we have greeters who are at the door

welcoming the members and guests. In addition to this, we believe it should be everyone's responsibility to be welcoming.

The LAC consisted of nine members of Antioch. The members of the LAC and I decided to form a focus group. The focus group included members of Antioch recruited by the LAC. The purpose of the focus group was to gather data regarding conversations in ministry regarding hospitality. Two focus groups were facilitated by the LAC because they felt that the volunteers in the focus group might be apprehensive about speaking candidly in front of the pastor.

A survey was also created by the LAC as a result of the feedback from the focus group. The congregation was given an opportunity to take a pre and post survey. Members of the LAC, Greeters, and Ushers also volunteered to visit two churches World Changers Church and a Spanish Church, International and a Ministerio Internacional En el Nombre de Jesus, for the purpose of experiencing hospitality within various denominations and cultures.

A Bible study series was designed to be discussion based, allowing personal narratives to surface and participants to engage one another. Throughout the series, we compared current events from a cultural and theological perspective in addition to the life of Jesus in the Gospels.

At the close of the project, I attempted to observe if visible transformation of hospitality had occurred. Who is our neighbor? What have we learned about being neighborly? Have we learned to be intentional in our rhetoric and become a church focused on ensuring no one feels marginalized when they engage with us?

## CHAPTER 2

### A CASE OF HOSPITALITY

It is approximately 9:15 am, and Sunday School is about to begin. The parishioners of Antioch Baptist Church are starting to arrive by foot, train, bus, and car. Outside are the tourists who have arrived early in order to be the first to get a seat reserved for our international guests. They are staying throughout Manhattan and part of their Harlem experience is attending a Sunday morning worship service at one of the black churches. They are here for one purpose and that is to hear gospel music. There is anticipation of seeing and experiencing something new. Before the visit, they are online asking questions to the ushers: “Will we be allowed inside? How long is the wait? Can we take pictures?” We have had some of our international guests ask if they will experience a performance from our choir similar to the movie “Sister Act.” They are informed that this is not a performance; however, they are willing to wait an hour, even in inclement weather.

One of our head ushers is outside counting the tourists and explaining the protocol of the ministry, informing them that no photos are allowed. He is admitting groups

of ten people at a time. As the line grows and space becomes limited in the sanctuary, other Harlem churches that have a gospel choir are recommended. Surprisingly, there are not many Baptist churches within walking distance of West 125th Street that feature gospel music and can accommodate the tourists.

One block away there is a Catholic church that has shifted its service by having someone sing a few gospel hymns. By the time these guests arrive at any of the other prominent Baptist or Methodist churches, the seats reserved for tourists will already have been taken.

Anticipating the possibility of not getting a seat, some of our guests outside are pleading to be admitted, expressing to our ushers how far they had to travel to hear gospel music. The latecomers find themselves disappointed after being informed that there are no more seats available. One of the tourists who attempted to visit our church posted on TripAdvisor<sup>1</sup>:

With all the respect I have for the church, we arrived 40 minutes earlier. They allowed less than 10 people and we were told that it was full. We were left with no opportunity to go to another Mass because that was when all the masses, they could have warned us before not to waste our time. I recommend looking for other less crowded churches like St. Joseph is also on 125<sup>th</sup> and people are much nicer.<sup>2</sup>

Those who are seated in our congregation are eager to take a picture or video of our service. Some guests even try to sneak a photograph; however, the ushers are policing them, constantly reminding the international guests of our policy: photography prohibited. One Sunday a member of Antioch observed an usher policing the tourists and

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<sup>1</sup> TripAdvisor, "Antioch Baptist Church," accessed February 1, 2018 [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d2335318-Reviews-Antioch\\_Baptist\\_Church-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html#REVIEWS](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d2335318-Reviews-Antioch_Baptist_Church-New_York_City_New_York.html#REVIEWS). The aforementioned comments are no longer accessible on the website. While there are some comments still available, the comments referenced cannot be recovered.

<sup>2</sup> TripAdvisor, "Antioch Baptist Church."

attempted to snatch the camera out of the person's hand because she thought the tourist was getting ready to take a picture.

Those international guests who are able to experience our worship services are intrigued by the music from the praise team as well as the choir. While they might come as spectators, many of them emulate what we do during the service by standing on their feet, clapping their hands, singing, dancing, and lifting up their hands as a form of worship. Since most of the international guests leave early, I have incorporated a designated time within our service where they are invited to the altar, given a gift, and I share with them the love of Jesus in a way that they can understand. Many leave moved to tears and impacted by their experience. Several of them are Catholic and they are accustomed to services lasting an hour. They remark that they have never experienced a church like ours. During the summer months, our service starts an hour earlier and lasts approximately one and a half hours so many of our visitors stay for the duration of the service.

At Antioch, many of us believe everyone should feel welcome regardless of their nationality. Over the years as pastor of Antioch, I began to have conversations with members and frequent guests to see whether they felt we had a heart of welcome. Occasionally on Sundays when I was not preaching, I took the time to serve as a greeter welcoming the congregants during service. Many of our members were surprised when they would see me at the door. Some of the latecomers were embarrassed to see me standing at the door. The ushers accused me of spying on them. It was not my heart to embarrass or spy on anyone, but to assess and emulate a spirit of welcome.

As Christians, especially those who serve in ministry, i.e. pastors, ministerial team, deacons, ushers, and greeters, are typically the first to interact with visitors. The manner in which we treat people can determine who might become a member. Not only do we have international visitors, but we have many local guests of various ethnicities who are visitors of our congregants, new residents in the area, or students from one of the local universities. Initially, I started this project with the focus around the ushers' treatment of our international guests, but discovered that during this project, it was not just the international guests that have been made to feel unwelcome but also local residents, and members of Antioch.

### **What is Hospitality?**

For Antioch hospitality begins with exemplifying our motto, "The Church with a Big Heart." The community and its leaders gave us this name because of our generosity and service within the neighborhood. Having a big heart is more than being an organization that feeds and provides services to the community. Our big heart should be felt by people as they enter the doors of the church. It is not just the ushers' responsibility to display hospitality but it should be embodied throughout the congregation. People should feel that the church members are glad they are here and genuinely care about them. A big heart is a part of hospitality and can be demonstrated through the congregation's actions, giving, kindness, words, and love towards our guests and one another. A kind heart should exhibit God's love to strangers or those who are marginalized, disenfranchised, unchurched, oppressed, poverty stricken, and homeless.

In 1978 Antioch implemented a hospitality ministry who was responsible for publicly greeting the guests. In other churches some hospitality ministries meet their

guests after service with light refreshments. This is a time when they take questions and provide answers regarding the ministry. Sometimes they provide a gift for their guests. The greeters, on the other hand, have become more visible in their approach to hospitality. You can usually find them at the door greeting the parishioners as they enter the church.

My passion for hospitality comes out of a deep love for people and my desire to see Antioch embrace people from all walks of life. This ties into the love factor that Jesus talks about when He tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is easier to love people you know, such as your neighbor, family, friends, and those with whom you fellowship in church. But how do we show love to the stranger, people who are different from us, or the unchurched? How often do members in our church feel like strangers because we can sit next to them and never know their names or have conversations with them? Sometimes it can be tough to love the stranger or the person who is not like us.

There are many diverse, scholarly views around the concept of hospitality. The work of theologians Alexander Stauch, Michele Hershberger, and Amy Oden provide a starting point for an understanding of hospitality. Alexander Stauch defines hospitality as:

A willingness to share, with discernment, what God has given us, including our family, home, finances, and food. It is an attitude of stewardship, where we do not own anything because we are merely the caretakers for the real owner, God. He desires that we share His stuff and His love, and we comply out of reverence and gratitude to Him. In relationships, we are to honor the boundaries of others, and share all we have without strings attached. In the church, we are to be welcoming, regardless of how we may feel.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community: Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1993), 17.

The key word here is discernment. Discernment is important especially in the twenty-first century. I am not comfortable with sharing my family and home with everyone. He suggests that we should be grateful for what we have and recognize that we are stewards of what God has given us. Being a good steward means that I understand that God requires us to be responsible for that which He has given us. How is our hospitality reflected at Antioch? Is it conditional and based on how we feel that day? Are we willing to go out of our way to encourage one another? Our level of hospitality can ultimately impact our effectiveness in evangelism and determine whether people will return. We might not be able to share our resources but we can share God's love with others.

To further clarify the meaning of hospitality, Hershberger asserts:

Hospitality is more than an action. It is more even than a state of mind that we generate now and then for our convenience. It is a particular way of looking at the world. In the simplest form, hospitality is seeing the stranger through the eyes of Jesus. It is choosing to look for Jesus in the eyes of each stranger. It is loving the stranger.<sup>4</sup>

Hospitality is looking at the world through the lens of Jesus. Hershberger suggests that we break down the walls that divide us. She explains that hospitality involves the church going out into the community and meeting the needs of not just people of color, but of all people. When our international guests arrive, we should not view them as strangers because the gentrified community is gradually becoming a part of our congregation, so we see the international guests as our friends who might be in need of the Gospel. As Christians, we are to see our visitors as God's children. Hospitality is an attitude that we display, which is developed from the inside out. Seeing through Jesus's eyes means

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<sup>4</sup> Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises*, The Giving Project Series (Harrisburg, VA: Herald Press, 1999), 31.

having love for a stranger to the point that you welcome them with no judgment. The Christian community cannot be judgmental and hospitable at the same time.

Jesus uses us to be His welcoming arms and to provide a reflection of Him drawing people from the outside into the church. As Christians, we are the ones who should make an impact on the lives of those who walk through the portals of the church.

Theologian Amy G. Oden shares a concept of Gospel hospitality that resonates with me:

Gospel hospitality is God's welcome, a welcome that is deep and wide. Gospel hospitality is God's welcome into a new way of seeing and living. Ultimately, gospel hospitality is God's welcome into abundant life, into God's own life.<sup>5</sup>

As Oden points out, Christians should be hospitable to all. Gospel hospitality is the kind of welcome that is heartfelt. It causes our horizontal relations to extend beyond all barriers because our vertical relationship is rooted in Christ and draws people to us because of the love that we display. Our churches should be a reflection of His love through our welcoming actions. Oden describes Gospel hospitality as “experiencing the marks of readiness, risk, repentance, and recognition.”<sup>6</sup> I embrace this concept because we should be ready when our guests arrive. What should readiness look like? It is the readiness to welcome that single mom whose baby is crying throughout the entire service, that person who might seem despondent or to have an attitude. It means embracing the hurt and the marginalized with a welcome from the heart. It is also taking a risk, which means you might jeopardize being rejected by those you welcome. Our guest might not receive our welcoming attitude due to their own hurt, but we are still ready to embrace

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<sup>5</sup> Amy G. Oden, *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

those who enter as strangers but leave like friends. This kind of hospitality allows us to offer God's love; as guests see God through us, it leads them to have a transformation that only God can give.

Oden invites us to put into practice hospitality by embracing the lost and broken, by inviting them into our home and/or church and having something to feed them: The Word of God. This can be risky especially when you are inviting people into your inner space, your home. However, it causes us to engage people over a meal or by fellowshiping, as we see the world through that person's lenses. It also allows us to be inclusive of people as we show God's love and kindness that recognizes people and transforms lives. We are living in a culture where people are hungry for forgiveness, love, peace, and joy, which the Gospel brings. Our world is full of bad news and we have the good news that Jesus still lives and He has given an invitation to come and fellowship with Him. This good news of the Gospel should be so contagious that when people see us, they see something different about us and want what we have.

Oden's definition of hospitality is a model I looked at for our ministry to embody. The meal might not be within our homes but at church or a meal at a restaurant. This kind of welcome opens up our hearts and leads to inviting, engaging, and welcoming people. It compels us to convey that we serve a loving, compassionate, and forgiving God. Gospel hospitality allows the light of God to shine to those who might feel helpless and hopeless in a Gospel-hungry world.

My definition of hospitality within the context of the church means treating people of all races, genders, sexual orientations, backgrounds with respect and dignity. It

means welcoming them with open arms without judgment or condemnation and sharing the love of Christ.

In *Widening the Welcome of Your Church*, Bernhard and Clapp defined hospitality as:

The attitude and practice of providing the atmosphere and opportunities, however risky in which strangers [a person not known by the host but having the potential to be a friend or enemy] are free to become friends, thereby feeling accepted, included and loved. The relationship thus opens up the possibility for eventual communion among the host, the stranger and God.<sup>7</sup>

I believe it is the church's responsibility to break down barriers and build relationships. We break down barriers by being willing to take risks. Throughout the Bible, people were vulnerable in taking risks by inviting strangers into their homes. In the Old Testament, Rahab, who was known as a harlot, took the risk of hiding two spies. As a result of her welcoming spirit, she became a part of the lineage of Jesus.

Our ushers have best described this welcoming attitude as one who has a "willingness to serve, a spirit of humility, and a heart of kindness"<sup>8</sup> since starting this project. This has also become another one of Antioch's mottos. Hospitality includes functioning as a servant who is willing to serve instead of being served. Accordingly, kindness must be displayed in words and deeds. Hospitality is an action word that, when put into practice, can have the potential to transform lives.

Welcoming people is an ongoing commitment and a long process, which must be intentional. Scholar Gary McIntosh asserts that:

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<sup>7</sup> Fred Bernard and Steve Clap, *Widening the Welcome of Your Church: Biblical Hospitality and the Vital Congregation*, 3rd ed. (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>8</sup> This is the Antioch Baptist Church Ushers' Motto.

In the late 1980's, researchers found that in order for a church to grow at the minimal rate of 5% per year, the church must attract and keep 16% of its first-time guests. Churches that experienced higher growth rates experienced return visits at a minimum of 25%. Churches that are in decline keep at most 8% of their first-time visitors. Therefore, the church that desires to grow by fifty new members a year must attract a minimum of three hundred visitors annually. The same research also revealed that the key to keeping the visitors is to get them through the church door a second time. Studies showed that 85% of second time attendees joined the church, which illustrates the importance of first impressions.”<sup>9</sup>

First impressions are lasting impressions. Sometimes you do not get an opportunity to get a second chance to represent Jesus to others.

A lack of hospitality has caused many churches within our community to experience a decline in membership. At several prominent churches, the majority of their membership is comprised of seniors that are facing physical challenges, dying, retiring, and relocating. People are not joining churches like they used to. For decades, people were a part of the local churches and brought their families as well as their friends. One must ask the question: what will cause people to return to church?

At Antioch Baptist Church we have become intentional about recognizing visitors no matter where they are from. During our welcome the members go out of their way to greet each other, with special emphasis on our guests. Once a guest joins, they attend our New Members Class that consists of a team of members from Antioch. The New Members Class is a six-week course strategically taught during the hours of Sunday School with the intention of getting the new members accustomed to arriving to church at 9:30 am. The goal is to encourage them to participate in our Sunday School Class after the New Members Classes are completed. Our Sunday School has grown, and the majority of our New Members attend this class.

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<sup>9</sup> Gary McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit: The Complete Guide to Connecting Guests to Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 24.

It is also important that the new members do not get lost within the ministry. New members are given a list of the various ministries that volunteers may join. Ministry leaders attend one of the New Members Classes where they are introduced to the new members. During the class the new members are given an explanation of the role of each ministry and they get an opportunity to ask questions and join. They are encouraged to serve on one of the ministries. Upon completion of the New Members Class we have what is called, the “right hand of fellowship.” The right hand of fellowship is given every first Sunday of the month. There are requirements to receive the right hand of fellowship.

1. You must be a member.
2. You must have been baptized
3. You must complete the New Members Class.

Upon completion of the New Members’ Class on first Sunday, which is our Communion Sunday, we once again introduce the new members to the congregation and they are given the right hand of fellowship by myself, the ministerial team, the deacons and deaconesses of Antioch. After the right hand of fellowship new members are given a certificate from Antioch and their pastor serve them communion. Hospitality does not stop at our guests or members who join our church, but it consists of being willing to be inconvenienced and go the distance to help our new members.

Many of our new members are single parents who are unchurched. Hospitality is helping people to find their way in our congregation. It is working to provide a support system for these single parents. Antioch also provides a youth ministry for our families. Being accountable to our new members is important to us because we believe it helps

them stay connected. When an individual joins a ministry, that team leader also becomes accountable to that new member. Members who sit next to someone and may not see them are encouraged to inform the church clerk or contact them. It is our experience when new members join the church and commit to a ministry, relationships are formed and they become accountable to the ministry. Everyone needs someone to whom they are accountable. Our goal is to see no one fall through the cracks or feel forgotten. Everyone matters!

In the past, our church has also been guilty of running people away from ministry. Several years ago, there was an incident where a new member was hurt by a leader during midweek Bible study. The new member had a servant's heart and was excited about ministry. The wife of a leader threw a book at the gentleman because he was talking while her husband was speaking. Humiliated, he never returned. By the time I found out, it was too late. The damage had already been done.

There are some Christians who have a spiritual gift for making people feel welcome, however, there are others for whom hospitality is not a natural inclination. It is not always easy to be hospitable, especially towards people who can be difficult. Those who are in the forefront, our ushers and greeters, often do not realize how first impressions impact others. This question was raised: Is it the ushers' responsibility to be hospitable? This project is not about the ushers but the church at large. Enhancing the culture of welcome is not only developed by preaching and teaching but also by implementing and practicing the aforementioned skills.

## **A Spirit of Excellence**

When people serve in ministry every Sunday, it is easy to feel overextended. Volunteers can become desensitized and see their position as a job and not ministry. This can cause one to lose his or her passion for serving the ministry in a spirit of excellence. During an Excellence Conference at Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church Dr. Alex Ellis, founder of Tied to Greatness, spoke about the importance of serving in a spirit of excellence. He stated, “Many times we are so busy doing ministry that we don’t take the time to step back and re-evaluate what we are doing so we can advance forward. We get comfortable in positions without ever growing. We just go through life. Every ministry should be moving forward with a degree of excellence. We want to go from good to great.”<sup>10</sup>

Hospitality is also serving people in a spirit of excellence. Excellence in all things is about paying attention to details. There are the aesthetic details and the details of our posture. The aesthetic details include the appearance and cleanliness of the building. Is there toilet paper and soap in the bathroom? Is the furniture maintained? Guests can also examine our body language to determine if it is inviting. Is a choir member singing with a frown on his or her face? Can people approach the pastor or the ministerial team? The little things mean a great deal. We should create a presence that not only the guests feel welcome but God feels welcomed.

From the moment visitors arrive at the church building until they leave, do they experience excellence? When the deacon or the minister is praying, is he or she praying as if she is doing people a favor or is the person interceding to reach heaven on behalf of

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<sup>10</sup> Alex Ellis, “Excellence in Ministry” (lecture, Excellence Conference, Union Grove Missionary Baptist Church, December 10, 2016).

someone else? After the benediction, do the leaders stay around to greet the people or are they in a hurry to leave? When guests leave, it is my desire that they experience a feeling of oneness and connection with God. I do not want anything about the worship experience to take away from the mission of the church, which is to proclaim the Gospel but I still believe that excellence should be displayed.

When one is serving in a ministry, is he serving to the glory of God? In the same way that Disney and corporate America expect excellence, so too should the church be a place of excellence. It begins with serving others as Christ served us. We should require excellence not perfection. When people come into our church they should feel the love of Jesus. Excellence means that no matter a person's age or color we create an atmosphere in which people are welcome and feel they are accepted. Excellence is setting a high standard. It is doing, saying, behaving from a position of excellence, including everyone from janitorial to ministerial staff. In ministry, just as in life, there must be a commitment—to rise above the mediocre, to ascend above the average, to soar like eagles.

Excellence makes the stranger feel welcome, but excellence in ministry does not come naturally to everyone. We expect our ushers and greeters to know how to be hospitable, therefore, training is necessary. I was asked the question, can hospitality be taught? I believe that hospitality is in the heart of an individual. For me, having a welcoming spirit came naturally because I lived in a home where all were welcomed and I was the pastor's daughter. There are those who are not hospitable, due to their past experiences. Our experiences help to shape our world. Oftentimes, we become

judgmental of people who are not warm, while failing to see life through their lenses. For some, it is only the power of God that can change an individual.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

#### **Theological Reflections**

When I was growing up, my parents were always hospitable to family, friends, and even strangers who entered our home. My dad had unique charisma that attracted people to him. He knew how to build relationships, so we would say, “He never met a stranger.” At home, Dad would prepare meals, and there was always an abundance of food left over just in case someone stopped by. He had a way of making everyone feel loved and connected whether he knew the person or not. His friends would bring their friends with them to our house. You were guaranteed to have a meal at our home. During that meal he always had a story to tell. Some of his stories were like parables that helped you to relate to everyday life. I still live my life on some of the same spirit of hospitality in church and outside of the church.

What happens when you invite someone into your home and you break bread with them? How do you transform one’s life by breaking bread and having a conversation with them? My father, Rev. Dr. Alfloyd Alston, the organizer of Antioch Baptist Church taught me the importance of hospitality through welcoming people into our home.

Dad, home was where his heart was, home was where he lived, home was where he worked, home was the church, home was where he would prepare a meal. He spent a lot of time at the church, where people would stop by for a conversation. Sometimes complete strangers visited, and he would invite them in to have a conversation over a snack or a meal. My home is a place where my family neighbors, friends, and their friends feel welcomed when they visit my home, sometimes unexpected. I am known for being able to create a meal or have a meal ready.

He made people feel like they mattered by calling them cousin even though they were not related. When we were guests in someone's home, somehow his hospitality at their home would extend beyond guest. He always brought something with him, including food, beverages, and of course his love. He ate with both drunks and gamblers and talked to prostitutes as well as abusers. He would often invite to our family dinners marginalized or lonely people, whom he treated like family. He never allowed us to be condescending towards them and he went out of his way to provide a space where all were welcome. People felt God's love through him. My dad had a way of sharing the kind of love that drew people to Jesus.

Whenever there was fellowship and Dad had the opportunity, he would encourage people, regardless of where he found himself. He was sensitive about not coming across as preachy but somehow his personality would lead someone to Jesus. I frequently watched transformation occur over time and some of those individuals became members of our church. This was the kind of influence my dad had on the life of those he encountered. Because of his love for humanity, he used his culinary talents to get to know people and make an impact on their lives; hospitality was never about the meal. He

enjoyed laughing and talking to people. His welcoming spirit invited people to have a conversation with him. He taught me the importance of welcoming people because wherever the heart is that is home. It was through many of these conversations with people that God would use Dad to show love. At times, it took the form of meeting a financial need, visiting a relative in the hospital, or just simply allowing conversations to take place in his office. People in our church community knew him and felt comfortable stopping by the church to say hello or have conversations with him. This is the kind of hospitality helped to grow Antioch. Many expressed how they felt connected to this extended family.

I see a correlation between my pastor and Paul. In the Corinthian Church, Paul addresses them regarding the Lord's Supper. He saw the Lord's Supper as a way of showing hospitality. He was angry with the Corinthian Church because they were busy judging one another instead of offering encouragement, so Paul challenged them to examine themselves. In other words, Paul was telling them, before you go and judge someone else, look at your life.<sup>1</sup> The Communion Table is a place where you can come and partake of the Lord's Supper, which for Baptists represents a symbol of Jesus's Body and His Blood.

Hospitality is more than a concept that the church decided to incorporate into its practice of ministry, it is an attitude of the heart and a way of being that defines Christian life. Through hospitality, Christians make room in their hearts for others in the community. Christian hospitality reflects a level of compassion that causes us to stand up for the disenfranchised, the hungry, the poor, the tired, the lonely, the hurting, the

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<sup>1</sup> See I Corinthians 11:23-29.

oppressed, and the foreigner. It compels us to invite them to be a part of the community of faith. This attitude displays our love and compassion for others and leads us to break the barriers of race, class, and religion; these factors divide our world.<sup>2</sup> Instead, we should have what Robert Schnase calls, “Radical Hospitality” or Christian Hospitality where we invite people in, meet their needs and extend the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

Christian hospitality is the active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending richness of life in Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

He further elaborates:

When the stranger arrives to the church we should be a reflection of Christian hospitality where all should be welcome to obtain physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing. It is a place where the lost, hurt, broken, abused, spectator, or stranger should be able to experience the presence of Almighty God. Churches characterized by Radical Hospitality are not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving visitors warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. Radical hospitality offers a surprising and unexpected quality of depth and authenticity in their caring for the stranger.<sup>4</sup>

What would happen if the church exemplified radical hospitality? This is a term I taught during my project. It is the kind of hospitality that should be experienced outside the church that would draw even the stranger inside where they want to be a participator instead of a spectator. Radical hospitality expresses passion and fire that we show towards our neighbors. It takes no thought of where you have been but is concerned about where you are going. This kind of hospitality gives of oneself, which consists of

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<sup>2</sup> Sylvia Cirone Deck, *Ministry of Hospitality*, Pastoral Ministry Series (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Schnase, *Five Practices: Radical Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

your time, talent, and treasure. It is the type of fire and passion that is inviting and engaging that causes you to be radical about making a difference in someone's life. When you see a visitor, you see them as a soul and are willing to do whatever it takes to connect to that individual. You are also willing to go the distance for a sister or brother.

Radical hospitality is not confined to the church but it also manifests outside of the church. Random acts of kindness, going outside to feed the community, bridging the gap between police and kids are all a part of our radical hospitality which I will discuss further in a later chapter. Radical hospitality is going the distance with someone you encounter who had mental illness. I met a twenty-eight-year-old young lady who was facing mental illness. She lost her children to the system and was homeless. In the midst of her mental illness and her brokenness, I was able to welcome this stranger in as I assisted her with navigating through the social service system. We provided food, clothes, and shelter for her and introduced her into the family of God – the church. Our genuine and loving concern for her was instrumental in cultivating her relationship with God.

In Matthew 23:34-35 Jesus said:

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.

The message of this passage emphasized that we welcome Jesus the King when we welcome a stranger, and that our place in God's eternal kingdom is connected to the place we make in our own lives for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, in prison, or a stranger to us. It is the example we show in loving the prostitute. This text speaks to the

homeless person that shows up in our churches on Sunday morning who might have an offensive odor. Acts of welcoming the stranger or leaving someone outside cold and hungry take on intensely heightened significance when Jesus himself is the one who experiences the consequences of our ministry or the lack of it.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Biblical Reflections**

Biblical hospitality is not just about being kind to one another but stepping out of your comfort zone. Hospitality can be found throughout the scripture whether it is providing food, shelter, or entertaining a guest or a stranger. Amy G. Oden suggests the following regarding hospitality:

At the very least, hospitality is the welcoming of the stranger. While hospitality can include acts of welcoming family and friends, its meaning within the Christian biblical and historical traditions has focused on receiving the alien and extending one’s resources to them. Hospitality extends to the physical, social, and spiritual needs of the stranger...through the needs of the hosts are addressed as well.<sup>6</sup>

While I agree that we should continue to be welcoming to the stranger, oftentimes, there are some conversations among members of Antioch that have arisen. How do we entertain strangers when we live in a society where the stranger shows up in the church to kill the people who are challenged to love and accept them? In twenty-first century ministry, one cannot help but continuously be on alert when a stranger arrives. After all, Jesus taught in Matthew 26:41 to watch as well as pray. How far is too far when it comes to going the extra mile in being a friend to the stranger? It is important to

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<sup>5</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Amy G. Oden, *And You Welcomed Me: A Source Book on Hospitality in Early Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 13-14.

be discerning and mindful of the prejudice that stems from a place of fear; being afraid of people who are different can cause us to be unwelcoming as in the case of this incident in Charleston, South Carolina where a white supremacist walked into a church and killed nine people including the pastor after they prayed for him.<sup>7</sup> Another incident was the shooting in Sutherland Springs, TX where a young man opened fired and killed twenty-six members including the pastor's daughter.

In examining the biblical text, I would like to explore another outlook of hospitality from outside the institutionalized church and make the connections. What does biblical hospitality look like outside of the institutionalized church? Prior to this project I viewed hospitality as something that was shown or given to friends or to people you wanted to make feel welcomed. Oden offers that traditionally; hospitality was also extended outwardly to strangers in need. The biblical text that has been the driving force of my project is Luke 10:25-37.

And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live. But he wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two

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<sup>7</sup> Ray Sanchez and Keith O'Shea, "Mass shooter Dylann Roof, with a laugh, confesses, 'I did it,'" CNN News Edition, December 10, 2016, accessed February 9, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/12/09/us/dylann-roof-trial-charleston-video/index.html>.

denari, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, “Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.’ So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” and he said, “He who showed mercy on him.” Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

This is the parable of what is known as The Good Samaritan. For the purpose of this project I want to focus on “The Parable of the Good Samaritan.” I used this biblical text as a key foundational scripture, which I built upon during the research process.

There were two reasons why I chose this parable. My goal was to collaborate with the project and challenge the church to be neighborly.

1. This parable was used as a part of our church theme and in collaboration with my project. Our theme was, “The Year of the Neighbor.” There was a four-week Sunday morning series around identifying our members understanding of who is there neighbor and the significance of being neighborly. The Year of the Neighbor was weaved into every ministry of Antioch during the year of 2017 and has continued in 2018. Every guest pastor who preached for us was given this theme and the text.
2. It is the kind of hospitality that I want Antioch to experience in and out of worship.

Luke 10, deals with hospitality, even though it is not institutional hospitality.

This text builds the question on neighborliness. It starts off with Jesus having a conversation with a lawyer around love. This lawyer is familiar with the law, yet he is trying to outsmart Jesus by justifying his love walk and asking the question, “Who is my neighbor?” Perhaps he was hoping that Jesus would say who was not his neighbor, so he would not have to love them.

Jesus began by describing a certain man who was beaten up by robbers and thieves and left for dead. A priest and a Levite see this man and do nothing. They leave him on the road to die. We can clearly see that the institution, the religious folks, or anyone who had religious identity failed this man miserably. They were the people who were not only in worship but they were also responsible for leading worship. In the text, Jesus talks about them and is specific about acknowledging each individual. Perhaps he recognized them because they were the ones leading worship. These are the people who are a part of the institutional/church that passed him by. Perhaps the priest could justify it by saying that he thought the man was dead and according to the law, he was not allowed to touch the corpse as mandated by Leviticus 21:1-3. How often do we look for a loophole to avoid helping our neighbor?

I ask the question: Can we fix the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan? They were the ones who are supposed to show us what hospitality looks like. How do those who are in leadership treat others inside and outside of the church? How often have we, the church, walked passed the drunk who might have been passed out on the cold ground? What about the homeless person, the beggar or someone in need of medical attention? The priest can represent me or any member of my ministerial team. The Levites can be the ushers, deacons, or any leader in our ministry.

Raising these questions causes me to believe that if the priest and the Levite had been taught to have a big heart, there would not have been a need for a stranger in this parable. How do we address the lack of a big heart? These two leaders who were supposed to be religious people passed by him. How could someone who has been taught the law become heartless and abundant this man? How often do members of the church

become heartless and rely on everyone else to do the hospitable thing and we do nothing? I had to evaluate myself and reflect on some questions: has there ever been a time that I looked the other way or passed someone in need because I was in a hurry or I just did not want to be bothered as a representative/priest of the church? Sometimes our own judgments and our own social biases causes us to fail people in need.

While neither the priest nor the Levite stopped to help him, there was a Samaritan who showed up. Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans therefore, he would be considered the least likely to help because the Samaritan did not practice the Jewish laws. The interesting part of this parable is that the Samaritan was not a part of the religious institution. He actually could have been considered a robber or a thief. All he knew was that there was a man in distress and perhaps he could be of service. He had a heart of kindness. This man, who is known as the Good Samaritan, took the time to clean him up and bandage his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them at his own expense. He later takes him to the inn, pays all of his expenses and asks the innkeeper to care for him until he returns. The religious folks did not see this man as their neighbor. They left the responsibility of being neighborly to someone else.

As stated previously, this text was not about hospitality within the institution of the church but outside of the church. However, the previous question remains, “can we fix or change the priest and the Levite in The Parable of the Good Samaritan? Looking at the members of Antioch as the priest and the Levites and looking back at what resided in my late pastor, Rev. Dr. Alfloyd Alston, regarding hospitality. I ask the question, “can we enhance our hospitality within the institution of the church?” Henri Nouwen explains that the goal of hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change

can take place, by creating a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend.<sup>8</sup> How does that change occur? It happens when we display a heart of God that will draw people towards Him. This is the church modeling hospitality so it can be duplicated. The Samaritan was an example of hospitality by showing compassion and providing medical attention, food, and shelter.

This story is a representation of Jesus's love and compassion for us. The oil may have represented the work of the Holy Spirit and the wine may have symbolized the shedding of blood.<sup>9</sup> This leads me to encourage my congregation as they walk through the streets of their communities to define their neighbor. Do they see their neighbor as their family, friends, or those who live next door to them or in their community? Is their neighbor the beggar, homeless person, single parent, the person who sits beside them every Sunday who may have just lost his job, or the spouse of a corporate executive who is being abused by her partner? They were challenged to look around them and examine who they define as their neighbor and how they are treating them.

This parable teaches us that our neighbor can be anyone and our neighbor could show up in some surprising places. I believe that God used this parable so the lawyer could evaluate his motives and explore what he would do if he was in the same place as the priest and the Levite. Would he have responded in love, like the Samaritan? Could it be that there are times when God sets us up in some neighborly situations inside and

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Nouwen, *Reaching Out: Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday & Co. 1975), 71.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Wellman, "Parable of the Good Samaritan: Meaning, Summary and Commentary," *Patheos*, April 21, 2014, accessed May 14, 2017, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2014/04/21/parable-of-the-good-samaritan-meaning-summary-and-commentary/#>.

outside the institution of the church, so we can see how we respond to others? Are we showing true authentic hospitality to our neighbors? Finally, this parable teaches us that we should be neighbors to anyone in need.

## CHAPTER 4

### PREPARATION FOR THE PROJECT

Discussion of my project began in November 2016. There were several steps that I had to take in preparation for this project.

1. Made an official announcement regarding my project during a Sunday morning service
2. Recruited members for the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC)
3. Formed a Focus Group
4. Developed an online survey

#### **Pastor's Announcements**

In November 2016, I announced to the congregation that I was beginning my research on hospitality and would be recruiting volunteers to be a part of my Lay Advisory Committee (LAC). I informed them of my project title, "Enhancing a Culture of Welcoming at the Church with a Big Heart." During my remarks I shared with them that we would establish a Lay Advisory Committee and the responsibilities of the

committee. That Sunday I began recruiting members who might be interested in serving as part of the LAC.

### **Lay Advisory Committee (LAC)**

Many of the congregants inquired about the LAC. Eleven members signed up to be a part of the LAC; five of them were chosen by me and six volunteered on their own. Our first meeting was on November 27, 2016. During our meeting, two of the eleven were unable to commit to the time frame of the project. The president of the greeters' and vice president of our ushers' ministry, two of our ministerial team, and our church clerk were chosen by me. The committee consisted of members who had been a part of Antioch for over 20 years, new members, leaders, males and females, seniors, and Millennials. Their responsibilities were to pray for the project, attend and participate in our meetings, conference calls, recruitment efforts and to facilitate the focus group, assist with developing survey questions, and Bible study.

Below are the names of the participants who were a part of the Lay Advisory Committee (LAC):

| <b><u>Names</u></b>   | <b><u>Affiliations</u></b>      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Candyce Adkins        | Church Clerk - Millennial       |
| Loretta Frieson       | Greeters Ministry President     |
| Martha Glenn          | Active Member for 12 years      |
| Hilda Hicks           | Ushers Ministry Vice President  |
| Obinna Igbe           | Deacon in Training – Millennial |
| Tammy Jackson         | Pastor's Aide President         |
| Dr. Theresa Lloyd     | Ministerial Team                |
| Sister Cynthia Lowe   | Acts of Kindness President      |
| Min. Lakisha Williams | Youth Minister                  |

Our first meeting was held in Antioch Baptist Church's Fellowship Hall and we met for one and one-half hours. This meeting consisted of the nine members from our

ministry, including two members of the ministerial team. We opened up in prayer. All members of the LAC introduced themselves sharing what made them join Antioch, and their experiences regarding the culture of hospitality at our church. I informed the LAC of the purpose and the expectation of the committee. The LAC would be responsible for being a liaison between the congregation and me and would assist with overseeing this project. Consent forms were given out and signed by the LAC. The idea of a focus group was presented to the LAC and the consensus was that the committee would assist in recruiting the group.

During the second meeting, a guideline for conducting a focus group was distributed and discussed. We developed questions that would help foster dialogue around the participants' experiences of hospitality at Antioch. It was important for me to hear their stories regarding hospitality that they encountered in our ministry. Richard Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones explain the importance of story when they wrote, "We understand ourselves in the form of a story, and we perceive events in the form of a narrative. Story is our access to reality. And any situation can be understood through more than one story, because no single account can tell everything that happened."<sup>1</sup> I wanted to explore what Hester and Kelli describes as the story behind the story, understanding that there is more than one perspective of a story. Using this book as a guide, the LAC and I understood that it was important to hear the narratives of the participants in the focus group. Various questions were asked to help gain better insight into the narratives. Time has shown that our experiences help shape our perspectives and our perspectives become our reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2009), 2.

## **Focus Group**

Based on the stories that many of us have heard in the past, the committee recognized that there were narratives that needed to be shared. The focus group would help us to create the questions for the survey and discussion for Bible study. The Committee agreed that in order to get an honest assessment of the ministry, I should not be present during the Focus Group discussion.

The LAC helped to recruit volunteers from Antioch to participate in the focus group. One of the persons who volunteered was the president of the ushers' ministry. One focus group was created and volunteers met on a Saturday afternoon. This group consisted of members who were 18 and older. There was only one senior who attended this group. On the following Sunday, the seniors, who I call "The Golden Saints," requested to have another focus group during their Wednesday afternoon Bible study class. The seniors in the class agreed to participate in the focus group. The LAC and I were open to having another focus group. Permission slips were created by the LAC and handed out to both groups. We also had a group of young people who had an opportunity to weigh in on the discussion during Sunday School. We did not call the youth a Focus Group, but they had an opportunity to discuss the topic of hospitality during Sunday School.

### **Focus Group #1**

Minister Lakisha Williams facilitated the first focus group and the LAC was there to assist. The session was designed to last one and one-half hours and was held in the lower level of our church. I welcomed the focus group, thanked them for volunteering, and shared with them the purpose of the group. I informed them that we wanted to do

our best to provide a safe space where they can be transparent. They were encouraged to be as candid as possible because this was a judgment-free zone. The focus group encouraged me to stay, stating they felt comfortable with me being present knowing that they would not be judged. I did not stay as I had an agreement with the LAC that I would not be present for such meetings. The participants were given permission slips, which they signed. They were aware that the discussion would be shared with me but their names would be anonymous. Once again, they reassured the LAC that it was acceptable if I stayed. Everyone appeared to be receptive about being a part of the project.

### **Focus Group #1**

During the focus group five questions were asked:

1. What is hospitality?
2. What is the culture of our church?
3. Who isn't here who needs to be here?
4. Who is responsible for implementing hospitality?
5. What does Antioch need to start?

After the focus group, I met with the LAC to discuss their findings. They stated that the group started off a little apprehensive to speak. The members were asked: What is the meaning of hospitality? Some of their responses were: being kind to people, understanding, having a heart of kindness, and controlling your reactions. This group was adamant about how certain groups within the ministry do not represent the welcoming spirit of their pastor.

During the feedback meeting with the LAC, one of the individuals stated that she shared with the focus group about her experience of being a new member. A friend who

was an active member of Antioch brought her to our church and this person got into some major trouble. The members were aware of the situation and she feared that she would be judged. It was just the opposite. She stated that Antioch continued to extend a warm welcome to her and never judged her based on her friend's actions and the members continued to show kindness to her after her friend left.

The focus group's dialogue continued around the subject of hospitality. Another participant shared how our former pastor, Rev. Alston, had a gift for drawing men into the ministry. He stated that Rev. Alston always made you feel like you mattered. This particular gentleman used to be homeless and our former pastor's warm and caring love helped change his life. He also shared an account where one of the leaders kept getting into trouble and Rev. Alston was always there to bail him out of jail. Someone else said, "While overall the people here are friendly, sometimes we can be cliquish and territorial. When new people come in and get involved in ministry, some people feel [the new people] are moving too fast and the long-term members do not want the [new members] to take on a leadership role."

Later during the discussion, focus group narratives became intense. The members expressed their frustration regarding the lack of respect the ushers have towards the international guests as well as some of the members of Antioch. The president of the ushers' ministry, who has a kind and gentle spirit, was a part of this focus group. The LAC shared with me that while a safe space was provided for all, it appeared to be an uncomfortable space for the president of the ushers' ministry, however he took responsibility as the president for the ushers' behavior. One of the participants shared her feelings regarding an usher's treatment of her guest.

One of our members shared:

Whenever I have a guest or guests come to Antioch, if their skin is white, I have to prep them beforehand. I tell them to tell the person at the door “I am the guest of one of the Ministers. I do this as a preventative measure so that I (and Pastor) won’t be embarrassed because of how they are treated. I tend to watch from the pulpit for their arrival, if they don’t get to church before service starts. I have even gone as far as showing the ushers pictures of the person they should look out for. I have come to instill this practice because there have been a few of my friends, co-workers and mentees, who have come to Antioch and have not been treated well—both people of color and those whose skin is white. I emphasize “white skin” because they are not always white. But our folk see white skin and automatically assume the person is a tourist, a voyeur who is not going to stay. This also means that Antioch may need to check its own colorist tendencies.”<sup>2</sup>

The president of the ushers’ ministry sat quietly as he listened to the comments being made. He has been in office for over fifteen years because no one else wanted the position and the other ushers recognized what joy it brought him to be the president. He enjoys serving on the ushers’ ministry and the fellowship that it brings within the Ushers Benevolence League. The Ushers Benevolence League is an organization comprised of approximately 50-75 ushers from churches throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, and the Westchester area. They meet monthly. However, every week one and sometimes two of the churches within the organization have an ushers’ anniversary and the churches in the league support the ushers. I have witnessed over one hundred ushers from the league present during our ushers’ yearly anniversary. Our president serves as a Marshall along with approximately twenty other male ushers in the league. Their duties are the same as the other ushers but this group is comprised of men.

The president of the ushers’ ministry is fully aware of the behavior that some of the ushers display. Their behavior has been accepted, not by the pastor but by the president, and perhaps considered the norm because some of them have been ushers for

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<sup>2</sup> Comment from participant in focus group #1.

over two decades. As the pastor, I have met with the president as well as some of the ushers on several occasions to discuss my observations. The focus group placed major emphasis on the treatment of our international guests and felt this topic should be discussed as a church body. Here are a few responses from some of the members from the focus group.

When asked to assess the culture of the church, some of the responses were polarized. They ranged from positive comments about praise and worship, teaching, living by the Word, the display of love, the presence of cliques within our church family to negative feedback about our members being out of order, ushers being rude to the tourists, and the need to teach people instead of humiliating them. The LAC stated that once again people were passionate about their opinions. Things became intensified and the focus group felt that there needed to be additional conversations about hospitality and the treatment of strangers, with emphasis on our international guests.

The LAC went on to ask if there were people who needed to be there who were not present. The group was appreciative that the president of the usher's ministry was there because he can have an impact on the ushers. However, the focus group felt like more people needed to be engaged in this conversation. Deacon Etheridge was the only deacon present and the group felt like more leaders and parents needed to participate. It was important for leaders to be there because they could help to take the discussion outcomes back to their respective ministries.

The LAC was running out of time so they asked, "Who is responsible for hospitality?" and "What does Antioch need to start doing?" The group started out by saying it was the pastor's responsibility to show hospitality. Another person responded

that the pastor has always modeled hospitality. They agreed that it is everyone's responsibility to show hospitality and suggested that the church become friendlier and humble; the church should show more respect, and listen to each other. One lady stated, "You are preaching to the choir. More ushers should be present. We are the ones who are in the trenches and are the agents of change."<sup>3</sup> Preaching to the choir is an expression that means you are talking to people who already agree with you. The women felt like the people who were a part of the focus group were the ones that are hospitable. In closing, one of the ushers present stated, "the life that we live should display a Christ-like mind. There is still room for growth. We are all a work in progress."

### **Focus Group #2**

Focus group number two was facilitated by Candyce Adkins during the Wednesday afternoon one o'clock Bible study. This group consisted of sixteen seniors who were determined to be a part of the focus group. I greeted them, shared the purpose of the group, and distributed consent forms to be completed by each volunteer. The questions asked were similar.

1. What is hospitality?
2. What is the culture of Antioch?
3. What needs to stop?
4. What needs to be implemented?
5. What needs to continue?

When asked to define hospitality, most of their answers were similar to the first focus group. This group began by talking about how first impressions are lasting

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<sup>3</sup> Comment from participant in focus group.

impressions. Initial impressions can change someone's worship experience. Making an impression with a positive attitude or a smile can be the difference between a good day and a bad day for someone. They also described hospitality as being sensitive enough to care about someone in order to connect with them. They pointed out that strangers sometimes are drawn to the church because they are emotionally hurt and bleeding inside. Their attitude might not be the best because of the challenges they faced before getting to the church. Because of these factors, the seniors said that we should have the heart of compassion that will encourage someone else.

Another question was asked about what behaviors need to stop at Antioch. The focus group responded by saying that we need to stop judging people, being disrespectful, and allowing people to walk freely in the back. They felt it is a distraction to our worship service when people are free to walk at any time. I was surprised that our seniors felt that our congregants were judgmental and disrespectful. The norm is that seniors are usually accused of being judgmental by our youth and young adults.

When asked what needs to be implemented in the church, many of the seniors felt that we needed mandatory training. Several of the people in this group consisted of retired professionals and they placed emphasis on training, especially customer service and hospitality training for the ushers. I was not a part of the group but I would have asked the focus group to elaborate on their views of customer service. Their collective response is similar to what Toler and Nelson expresses in *The Five Star Church*:

If there is any single area where churches neglect to take their ministry seriously, it is in the area of training. Given the rise of the lay movement and the emergence of user-friendly technology, the need and ability to train have never been greater. A significant amount of the church budget should be reinvested into developing people. The greatest asset of any congregation is its people, and training enhances that asset.

Training is essential in ministry. The church is the only place where we allow people to serve in an area of ministry where they do not have the skillset for the position and sometimes they do not have the heart; we allow them to serve any way because they are volunteers. One of the participants stated, “It’s better to train people and lose them than not to train them and keep them.” Implementation of training and innovative ways of doing ministry can oftentimes face resistance. Leaders should always be ready and willing to grow, share information, and be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, including recognizing when their season is over in a certain capacity. We have people who have served as a leader in a particular ministry for years without a successor. When new members join, we now ask our new members team to explore their gifts.

Exploring an individual’s gifts is important. We must be better at finding a place for everyone who is willing to serve and better at recognizing that just because people are willing does not necessarily mean they are qualified for a particular ministry role.

Training helps to enhance our ministry and helps us to flow in a spirit of excellence.

Finally, when asked what should continue, the seniors underscored the importance of outreach to members. For our seniors, it brings joy when they receive a call from the pastor or any member of Antioch when they are not present in church. One lady stated, “People need to know that you care.”<sup>4</sup>

Our youths and young adults also provided feedback regarding hospitality. They did not join any of the Focus Groups, even though they were invited to be a part of the first group. Nonetheless, they had constant dialogue with our youth leader, Minister Williams, during Sunday School. Here is a comment that was discussed during their

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<sup>4</sup> Comment from participant in focus group #1.

session, which I received via text:

From my observation on the problems is that members are not always welcoming to people who come who are not already connected to someone in the church. While we should take time to get to know visitors, our actions should not keep our visitors from wanting to come back. When we do our welcome we will greet each other but are usually told to go greet our international guests (which I think should be automatic). Members can be territorial. It is one thing to like to sit in a certain place but it becomes problematic when a guest is moved so a member can sit in “their seat.” I believe this is why the youth don’t come to the front on youth Sundays. Although it is not done (not sure why) any more but when it was those who sit in the front refused to give up “their seat” or acted annoyed because the youth were up front.

This comment underscored the importance of biblical teaching on the subject of Christian hospitality. Hospitality is not only how we treat our guests, but how we treat each other and extend love to whomever we encounter. I appreciate the fact that this individual did not place blame on the ushers but on the church at large. The former generation used to say that our youth will become the church of tomorrow, but our youth are the church of today. How they feel matters. They are a vital part of the Body of Christ. Without our youth, we have a dying church.

Another one of our young adults shared this response:

Ushers need to work on better communication with the visitors who are not familiar with the “Church Culture” as well as how they speak to the regular Antioch Baptist Church members and attendees; however, they have gotten better. They are not as brazen as they used to be, but they still need to work on customer services skills and people skills.

Some of our young adults had a discussion regarding the concept of customer service in the church. These young adults expressed the importance of making guests feel welcome because, just like in business, we want them to return. They believe that if everyone who is a member of Antioch is responsible for going out of their way and making guests and members feel welcome. For me, customer service is when you serve people in a spirit of

excellence, no matter what ministry of which you are a part. When someone calls our church, the receptionist says: “Good Morning! It’s a great day in the life of Antioch Baptist Church! How may I serve you in a spirit of excellence?” It is her assignment to provide quality service to that individual. If the caller has a question regarding ministry or our Academy and the receptionist does not know the answer, she has the responsibility of being able to point the caller in the right direction. If someone needs prayer, we pray for him or her. This response is a part of excellence. How we answer the telephone is important. Someone in the youth group stated, “one of the ushers look[s at and] treat[s] our guests like he is leading cattle as directs our guests to their seats.

### **Online Survey**

After the focus groups met, some of the LAC came together to develop the pre-survey. Announcements were made during the Sunday morning worship service for volunteers to take the online survey. As stated previously, some of our seniors were not able to take the survey on their own because they did not have access to a computer. Our church clerk made the laptops available after service and during the afternoon midweek service. Others were able to use their cell phones to take the online survey. A six-week Bible study series was implemented and the journey began.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

#### **Are You My Neighbor?**

Antioch's theme for the year 2017 was in conjunction with the project. We began the year with our theme being, "The Year of the Neighbor." The scripture came from Matthew 22:39, "Love your neighbor as yourself." We used the motto taken from the ushers' ministry, "Having a willingness to serve, a spirit of humility, and a heart of kindness" to keep us focus. One week prior to the bible study I began a four-week teaching from this passage of scripture as a lead way into the bible study. Hospitality was the theme for our ministry throughout the year. Our ministerial team sermons reflected the central theme and ministry anniversaries represented hospitality. Some of the key words throughout the year were hospitality, love, neighbor, customer service, big heart, kindness, and welcome. Other terms began to enhance our knowledge of hospitality—Gospel Hospitality and Radical Hospitality. The majority of the church was on board with "Enhancing the Culture of Welcoming at the Church with a Big Heart."

## **Pre-Survey**

After the focus group I launched an online survey for the purpose of receiving qualitative data that would provide feedback from our members understanding of the culture of hospitality at Antioch. Members were encouraged to take the survey after service on Sunday. Laptops were provided in the sanctuary to make it convenient for those without a computer or members who had challenges taking the survey with their cell phones. Obinna Igbe, one of the LAC volunteers who is also a PhD student at City College, worked with me to interpret the data from the survey.

## **Summary of the Responses**

Evaluation from the Survey

**First Survey:** Date: 1/29/2017 to 2/12/2017

### **About the Participants:**

To be able to understand the responses of this survey, which lasted from 1/29/2017 to 2/12/2017, we start by looking at the age groups that participated in the survey and how long they have been members of Antioch Baptist Church. We had twenty-two respondents who participated in our survey. I use the word respondents instead of members because I discovered that some of the participants who took the survey were not official members of Antioch.

#### 1. What is your age?

The survey revealed that (86%) of the respondents were age 45 or older, and the remaining percentage (14%) are shared between age group 35-44 (5%) and young adults 25-34 (9%). No member of the congregation below the age of 25 participated in this

survey. Hence, the responses in this survey reflect the opinion of the older members of the congregation.

2. How long have the respondents been a member of Antioch Baptist Church?

The majority (43%) of the respondents who took the survey have spent 20 years and above at Antioch, and (9%) of the responses came from participants who are not official members of the church.

3. Comparing the age of the respondents and how long they have been a member.

The participants who have spent 10 years or more in the church mainly consists of members of that same age group 45 years and above.

4. How would you define hospitality?

There were keywords found in the responses to these questions which includes:

- Showing love to both members and visitors
- Being understanding
- Greeting visitors/members
- Making some feel welcome
- Putting up a good smile at all times especially while greeting someone
- Giving a warm friendly reception to visitors and guest
- Helping hand when someone is in need.

These were similar terms used during the focus group and the bible study.

5. How many people or families have you invited to visit or join Antioch in the past year?

At least 70% of the participants of this survey have invited three or more new families or people to join Antioch in the past year. Respondents stated that their reasons for inviting

new families:

- To hear the Word of God
  - The visitors do not have a church home or asked to visit the church,
  - Antioch is a place of love and the respondents would want the visitors to experience both how we worship as a church, and the love of Jesus Christ.
  - The participants wanted to share their spiritual experience with the visitors.
6. What message do people receive from the interactions they have with those they meet upon entering Antioch, in the hallways and the sanctuary?

For this question, most 69% of the respondents believe the visitors received a warm welcome while they are being led to their seat. The remaining 31% believes that the visitors receive a mixed message which is mostly unpleasant and apprehension.

7. Do visitors to Antioch feel an immediate acceptance or a conditional acceptance from those they encounter?

The survey revealed that 73% of the respondents believe that visitors receive immediate acceptance, 27% believe that they do not. But on looking at all the comments given by the respondents on this question, I discovered that 47% of the respondents also believe that it depends on who the visitors meet.

8. Do you think you have ever made someone feel unwelcome in Antioch by something you said or did, even if by accident?

The survey revealed that 83% of the respondents said they have never made someone feel unwelcome, while 17% believe they have made someone feel unwelcome. An interesting thing to note is that though majority of the responders 83% believe that they have not made any visitor feel unwelcome 70% of the respondents agreed that they have seen

someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome.

9. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to display hospitality within our ministry?

Here, all but one of the respondents believe that it is the job of the following:

Pastor/Ministers, Greeters, Church Leaders, Members, and Ushers.

10. Are members of Antioch prepared to welcome guests?

The survey revealed that 17% of the respondents believe that the members of Antioch Baptist church are not yet prepared to welcome the guests, while the remaining (83%) believe the members are ready.

### **Bible Study**

The bible study classes were held on Wednesdays at one o'clock p.m. and seven o'clock p.m. I taught on hospitality for six weeks. Each class was taught for one hour. Both classes were held in the fellowship hall usually with a meal. I had to push back the initial class a week once we incorporated a Focus Group for the seniors.

#### **Week One:** What is Hospitality?

The purpose of this class was to define hospitality and explore examples of old and New Testament biblical hospitality. People shared their experiences of hospitality and how we can build a loving Christian community that is welcoming to all.

#### **Week Two:** Who is My Neighbor? Luke 10:25-37

The objective of this class was to define who is our neighbor based on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

#### **Week Three: The Hospitality Commands – Hebrews 13:1**

This class ask the question: What does hospitality commands? What does our

mantra,

#### **Week Four: What is Radical Hospitality?**

The objective of this lesson was to explore the biblical definition of hospitality. During this class we discussed Robert Schnase book, “Five Practices to Radical Hospitality.”

#### **Week Five: Hospitality vs. Customer Service**

The objective of this class was to ask the question are there any similarities between hospitality and customer service. What does it mean to provide excellence in ministry?

#### **Week Six: Where do we go From Here?**

The objective of this lesson is to explore new ways of being that will make a mark that will never be erased. In this class I introduced the acronym for E.M.B.R.A.C.E. as a hospitality model for us to follow within our church community and our ministries.

#### **The Site Visits**

During the six-week period our LAC and the ushers visited two churches. The first church was World Changers New York where the Pastors are Creflo and Taffi Dollar. World Changers is located in the Bronx on the Grand Concourse off of Fordham Road. It is in an area where residents as well as tourist shop. Five of the LAC attended the service that was held on a Saturday evening at 6:00 p.m., however no one from the usher’s ministry was available due to the time of service. World Changers is a large congregation with ample amount of seating available, therefore we did not contact them to inform them that we were attending their service. We embarked on the journey to experience the culture of hospitality at a church with a diverse population.

The next week I met with the LAC and we were able to discuss our experience and observations at World Changers Church New York. The first thing everyone noticed that upon entering the building visitors as well as members were scanned by security and had to go through a metal detector. This is due to the mass church shootings that occurred in Charleston, South Carolina and Sutherland, Texas. Immediately after the security check point we were approached by the greeters. They seemed excited and happy to see us. They treated us as if they knew we were coming. One of the greeters gave us a free CD after service. We noted that the greeters were located in the vestibule which was a large common area outside of the sanctuary.

After meeting the greeters, we were escorted into the sanctuary by the ushers who just like the greeters, smiled as they escorted us to our seats. The LAC noticed the diverse races that makeup World Changers. The ushers did not differentiate between visitors, tourists, or members.

When we arrived the worship service had already begun, however we were able to sit together. During the service they acknowledged all first-time visitors. There were at least thirty-five maybe more first-time guests. After they acknowledged all first-time guests there was a brief sixty seconds pause for us to walk around and greet someone that we had not seen before. Many people came to greet us and welcome us to the church. People greeted us with a smile as they welcomed us. The service was in English but I wondered if they had another section for interpretation of other language since the ministry is so diversified. After service the first-time visitors were given a CD as a gift. We also observed how a large number of the church members stayed behind after service to greet one another and clean up the sanctuary.

Two weeks later our LAC along with several of our ushers attended a Thursday night midweek service at a Spanish church, Ministerio Internacional En el Nombre de Jesus where the pastors are Dionicio and Ramona Tavarez. Ministerio Internacional En el Nombre of Jesus is located in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan which is a predominately Hispanic neighborhood. Prior to becoming a church, it was a nightclub located on the second level of a commercial space. The capacity of seats was approximately 200-250. A former Spanish member of Antioch joined this church after she married. Her husband was Spanish speaking and spoke very little English. She has since has relocated to Florida.

During this visit seventeen of us attended the service. The purpose of this visit was to experience a Spanish speaking church's worship service. The goal was to help us to become sensitive to our guests who visit our church and might not understand the language. The group was given the same objectives as the LAC who visited World Changers. This was a much larger group and the majority of those in attendance were ushers. One of the leaders of the ushers' ministry, who is a part of the LAC, encouraged the ushers to attend. She was one of the ushers that I previously had challenges with regarding her attitude towards our guest, however she has a heart for Antioch and ministry. The president of the ushers and the greeters also attend the service.

Prior to attending the Thursday night service, I attempted to contact the church to ask permission from one of the pastors to experience their worship service for the purpose of my project. I was unable to speak to someone but I left a message. My minister was able to contact someone from the ministry and shared with the minister that I was working on a project for my degree. She asked permission for me and several of

my members to participate in their service. They welcomed us with open arms. Upon arrival we walked up a flight of stairs to get to the sanctuary. There were members from their congregation who greeted us. It was obvious that we were visitors. When we entered the sanctuary, we experienced their warm hospitality greeting us with a hug but also with a look of curiosity. I can imagine they were thinking, “who are they and why are they there?” Even though the congregation was not aware that we were coming the pastors welcomed us to come at any time. When the young lady saw us she immediately knew who we were and informed the pastor that we were there to fellowship with them.

During their Thursday service there were approximately one hundred people present. The lights were dimmed in the sanctuary, praise and worship music was playing, in Spanish, but we understood it in English. People were praying at the altar, some were on their knees, others were standing with their hands lifted up, and some were in their seats praying and meditating. I thought to myself, this is what our international guests experience when they hear us sing gospel music during their visit.” We did not understand the language yet we had an idea what was being said to the congregation. They went out of their way to be welcoming. I must admit that I was distracted watching every detail of the service. One minister got up and spoke for approximately five minutes in English. When the pastor started to preach he had someone translate in English. At the end of the service I met the pastors. They thanked us for coming and invited us back.

Hospitality is clearly a quality of God and is meant to be a quality of God’s people as well.<sup>1</sup> During our ride in our church van back to Antioch the group reflected on their experience. One of the ushers stated that the very thing they prohibit the tourist

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<sup>1</sup> Henry G. Brinton, *The Welcoming Congregation: Roots and Fruits of Christian Hospitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 4.

from doing, taking pictures, was the same thing she wanted to do. Many found themselves intrigued by the worship service. We knew most of the songs even though they were in Spanish. Everyone made you feel welcome. The ushers left there saying, “Where do we go from here and what can we do differently?”

### **Post Bible Study Survey**

After the conclusion of the last bible study and the visitation to the two churches the LAC encouraged the congregation to take the post survey in order to measure how far we have come since the beginning of our journey. The post survey was exactly the same questions as our pre-survey and the process for completing the survey was the same. Data was collected by myself and the LAC. Below you will find graphs as well as the summary of each response.

### **Post Bible Study Survey**

**Second Survey Date:** 4/23/2017 to 4/30/2017

This survey would be compared to the one done above.

### **About the Participants:**

To be able to understand the responses of this survey lasting from April 23, 2017 to April 30, 2017 we start by looking at the age groups that participated in the survey and how long they have been members of Antioch Baptist Church.

1. What is your age?

This survey was completed by a good number of young adults who were age 34 and below which consisted of 26% whereas in the pre-survey 2% participated in the survey.

The percentage of the elderly members of the church in this survey remained the same as the pre-survey.

2. How long have the respondent been a member of Antioch Baptist Church.

The majority 32% of the respondents still stated that they have spent 20 years and above in the church, and 5% of the responses came from participants that are not official members of the church. Hence, when compared to the pre-survey the majority of those that completed both surveys (1 and 2) have spent 20 years and above in the church.

3. Comparing the age of the respondents and how long they have been a member.

Nothing changed in this area.

4. How would you define hospitality?

Love and radical hospitality were the key words. Radical hospitality is a new term in our ministry. Our members are displaying radical hospitality.

5. How many people or families have you invited to visit or join Antioch in the past year?

The survey revealed that (55%) of the participants of this survey have invited 3 or more new families or people to join Antioch in the past year as compared to 70% from the pre-survey. I attribute the number being low due to the younger participants. The keywords found in the reasons given by respondents on why they invited guests to Antioch Baptist Church contained the following key words:

- The Word of God
- Worship
- Church

These three phrases/words can be found in the same definitions given by the participants of the initial survey.

6. What message do people receive from the interactions they have with those they

meet upon entering Antioch, in the hallways and in the sanctuary?

The survey revealed that 95% of the respondents believe the visitors received a warm welcome while they are being led to their seat. The remaining 5% believes that the visitors receive a mixed message which is mostly unpleasant and apprehension. This 95% stated above represent an improvement of 26% from the 69% stated in pre-survey.

7. Do visitors to Antioch feel an immediate acceptance or a conditional acceptance from those they encounter?

The survey revealed that 89% of the respondents believe that visitors receive immediate acceptance, 11% believe that visitors experience immediate acceptance from those they encounter. But on looking at all the comments given by the respondents from the pre-survey and those of this survey, both respondents 47% of the pre-survey and 33% of post-survey believe that it depends on who the visitors encounter.

8. Do you think you have ever made someone feel unwelcome in Antioch by something you said or did, even if by accident?

We see that 82% of the respondents said they have never made someone feel unwelcome, while 18% believe they have made someone feel unwelcome. An interesting point to note is that though the majority of the responders 82% believe that they have not made any visitor feel unwelcome 78% of the respondents agreed that they have seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome.

9. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to display hospitality within our ministry?

Here, all but one of the respondents believe that it is the job of the following:

Pastor/Ministers, Greeters, Church Leaders, Members and Ushers.

10. Are members of Antioch prepared to welcome guests?

The survey found that 18% of the respondents believe that the members of Antioch Baptist church are not yet prepared, while, the remaining 82% believe the members are ready.

### **Summary**

The post-survey was a more diverse population. Although many of the young adult population did not take part in the pre-survey I believe based on the narratives of our congregation, the comments on social media from our international guests who visited our ministry, the warmth of the ushers' ministry, and the growth of the church I believe we have created a new culture at the church with a big heart. Our members shared how the spirit of welcoming has been enhanced. The transformation of this culture started with me amplifying that welcoming spirit and it extended to the leaders and the congregation. It is my prayer that we continue to make an impact on our guests through a song, prayer, scripture, sermon, or by our warm hospitality that will have a lasting impression.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT AND CONCLUSION

#### **Research**

My research helped me explore hospitality in the culture of Antioch Baptist Church. In evaluating the project, I wanted to examine to see if any change may have occurred within Antioch. My goal was to listen to the narratives of the members of Antioch and allow those stories to provide a wider understanding of hospitality within our church in order to enhance our ministry. I wanted to see if the stories had change from pre-bible study to post bible study. I also wanted to evaluate the impact of the pre and post surveys that were taken and make sense of Antioch's interpretation of hospitality. The research approach that resonated with me was the qualitative research which I used for my project. John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt described qualitative research:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic, approach to its subject matter. This means the qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret,

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.<sup>1</sup>

This method is very broad but it allowed me to use different approaches- narratives, focus groups, storytelling, and surveys to get a better understanding of hospitality in our ministry. My project focused on the planning, development, and implementation of a four weeks of a preaching series and six weeks of bible study on hospitality. The bible study provided theological, biblical, and practical tools for us to continue cultivating Christian Hospitality.

I recruited a Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) that helped assist with this project. I needed them to provide guidance, feedback, encouragement and participate in the project. The LAC was also responsible with assisting in recruiting volunteers and facilitating the focus group, creating and interpreting the survey, and recruiting members to visit the two churches.

### **Evaluation of the Lay Advisory Committee**

The Lay Advisory Committee was valuable to this project in assisting me with planning and implementation. When forming the LAC it was important to have a team that was divers. I was looking for Millennials, leaders of ministry, new members who joined with the past one to three years, and seniors to volunteer. We started out with - eleven LAC and ended up with nine. Two of the volunteers were unable to commit to the team. One of the volunteers was a male Millennial and the other was not a member of Antioch. We had one male who was a part of the LAC who is a deacon in training, four

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<sup>1</sup>John Swinton and Harriet Mowatt, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 29.

of the LAC are head of a ministry, two were a part of our ministerial team, and one was a lay person. Six of the LAC joined under my leadership.

I engaged the LAC through monthly meetings at Antioch, by telephone conference calls, emails, and personal conversations. During the first meeting they shared their narratives around hospitality at Antioch, and their view of hospitality. It was rare that all nine of the LAC were present, however those who were in attendance always gave one hundred percent of themselves during our meetings. Our first meeting was November 27, 2018. The LAC and I discussed the timeline of the project, planned how we were going to create our focus group and survey, and I opened up the group for questions and comments. The LAC helped recruit for the focus group through our Sunday announcements and speaking to members individually. I also elaborated on the purpose of the focus group during the Sunday morning worship service. The next meeting the LAC and I developed the focus group questions. Not everyone was available for this meeting due to prior commitments. I kept everyone informed through email and/or text message.

We had two focus groups one lead by Minister Lakisha Williams facilitated the first Focus Group and Candyce Adkins facilitate the senior group. We started out with planning for only one group, however the seniors wanted to be a part of the Focus Group so we created a group during their bible study class. As stated in Chapter 4, the LAC suggested that I should not be present because we wanted the Focus Group to be candid in their discussion. The first focus group addressed concerns around the hospitality of the ushers. This group appeared to be concerned and hurt by their observations of other ministries lack of hospitality. The second focus group focused on the importance of

training within the ministry. This group was solution driven and provided suggestions for facilitators to come and train on hospitality.

As stated in Chapter 4 this project helped the ministry at large to re-establish the culture of welcoming. The LAC represented all facets of ministry and embraced this project with a sense of ownership. Part of the evaluation involved observing the changes that had occurred within the ministry.

We developed a pre and post survey. The purpose of the survey was to get an understanding of how Antioch view hospitality pre-bible-study and post-bible-study. Some of the members of the LAC assisted me with sorting and interpreting the data. The surveys were completed by members as well as non-members. The pre-survey was made available for three consecutive Sundays and the post-survey was available for one week. Both surveys asked ten questions which were exactly the same. The first section of the survey was general information which really did not measure hospitality. We asked for their age and length of time they were members of Antioch. The next section asked their definition of hospitality. The pre-surveyors gave basic answers of love, greeting, making someone feel special, helping hand, understanding, and a warm and friendly welcome.

The post-surveys showed that radical hospitality was a great way of understanding hospitality. Schnase says, Churches characterized by radical hospitality is not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving visitors warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness because they realize so many people do not have a relationship to a faith community. They desire to learn about inviting and welcoming more people and younger people and more diverse people into their congregation.<sup>2</sup> I did not just teach about

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<sup>2</sup> Schnase, *Five Practices*, 17.

radical hospitality we began to immediately start implementing it. As we began to practice hospitality it became bigger than the tourist and Antioch became visible within our community. Radical hospitality began with a welcoming song that was created by our music ministry and it incorporated the congregation and the guests. It included dancing and celebration of all those who are in attendance.

The Bible Study was fruitful when I started teaching on radical hospitality. We discussed ways that Jesus showed radical hospitality when He turned water into wine. This project has helped Antioch to reflect how we have treated each other as well as the international guests. What can we do that is outside the box but will draw people into the church? The class gained clarity on the meaning of hospitality and realized that it is everyone's responsibility to show hospitality. Out of all the biblical lessons taught the teaching on radical hospitality caused us to embody everything we did. Radical hospitality was exemplified in our ministry when the church moved outside the confinement of the four walls of the building and began to be a face in our community.

Peace in the Street has always been an annual event held by Antioch where we serve the community in the schoolyard connected to Grant Housing. We provide free hot dogs and hamburgers, music and entertainment while sharing the Gospel to our neighbors within the community. At the end of this project Peace in the Street was held in front of our church instead of the park. Food and entertainment was provided and we added a prayer station where we prayed for those who requested prayer.

I serve as the clergy liaison for the 26th precinct and help chair an annual event called Cops and Kids. This is an event that is also held in the park and we serve an abundance of food to the kids and the community. Several of our police officers from the

local precincts in Harlem collaborate with kids for a game of basketball. There are several tournaments between the police officers and the children where awards are given out to the kids. Last year Antioch played a major role in the Cops and Kids event because they have become radical about being servant leaders and impacting our community.

When I first started this project the on hospitality the narratives shared focused on how hospitable the ushers were to the tourists. Today there is conversation around our hospitality within our community. We are looking at what will be next for us as we share the good news of the Gospel.

The narratives have been powerful. It is through these stories that we get to understand the world of others. Our narratives are our preconceived notions about our world that are profoundly influenced by our family and cultural narratives.<sup>3</sup> The narratives shared earlier in the project compared to the stories shared now has helped me as well as many of the congregants to experience transformation throughout Antioch. We are witnessing a level of kindness and compassion that was not there prior to the project. I am witnessing ushers going out their way to help others and recruiting new members to be a part of their team. Transformation at Antioch has occurred. In Carl Savage and William Presnell's book "Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities" they stated, there are two parts to our notion of evaluating: observing change and discerning transformation.<sup>4</sup> Transformation of welcoming is being modeled through the attitudes, heart, and spirit of the people in our

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<sup>3</sup> Hester and Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Savage and William Presnell, *Narrative Research in Ministry: A Postmodern Approach for Faith Communities* (Louisville: KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2008), 123.

ministry. The ushers are intentional about having a pleasant attitude, our deacons and deaconesses are engaging the congregation and visitors after service and the members of Antioch are learning to model hospitality. I am excited to witness our children involved in displaying acts of kindness to one another.

Savage and Presnell's functionalist approach was helpful to me in implementing the project. The functionalist viewpoint seeks to discern how parts of a context might fit together differently now than they did before; it takes a look backward and takes advantage of hindsight. When one part has changed, then the whole is impacted as well.<sup>5</sup>

The teaching on radical hospitality has caused a change in the way ushers are serving. I also incorporated the acronym E.M.B.R.A.C.E that was also taught during Bible class. When ushers are serving they have been challenge to think about this acronym. E.M.B.R.A.C.E. stands for:

E – Every soul is precious in God's eyesight despite culture or ethnicity.  
 M – Minister with love, laughter and life  
 B – Be sensitive to others  
 R – Remember that God is always watching  
 A – Assign only the best to represent your ministry  
 C – Christ at the center of your service  
 E – Eliminate every potential hindrance to excellence.

One of our ushers who use to be agitated by our international guests stated, "I don't want this to be a project that you write about, we implement it for a season, then after your graduation it is over. We forget to continue to build on the work that you have done to get us to this place." In the words of Dr. Leonard Sweet, well done does not mean all done!

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 125.

## **Limitations**

I faced many limitations during this project. The personal limitations I faced was time restraints, caring for a mother and mother in law with dementia, and having my daughter constantly battle with epilepsy, causing her to have seizures every month sometimes as many as three in one day and five in one month. My time spent caring for my family was a major distraction, however my family, church family, and friends were a source of support and strength. Another limitation is not having the ability to speak with our international guests after service. We realize we would not be able to survey the tourist themselves.

There were also limitations within the project with my LAC and scheduling, as well as the surveys. I should have documented or record discussions with the permission of the class instead of relying on memory. My friend Pastor Frederick Crawford says on the Commanding Your Mornings Call, “A dull pencil is better than a sharp memory.” There were many narratives that went undocumented.

Initially I did not have a clear understanding of creating a survey that could measure outcomes. The majority of the LAC should have been present when creating the survey. I believe that we could have developed a more detailed survey that would have helped guide my project further. The initial survey did not represent a diverse age range to get a fair assessment. The second survey was more diversified, however I found it challenging to measure because people took the second survey who did not take the first survey. I would have structured the survey differently and maybe narrowed it down to the bible study and Youth Sunday School class.

A set-back for me is not feeling comfortable asking for help earlier from the LAC because I did not want to impose on them and not asking for assistance from my advisors when I was not clear. I am grateful that when I got myself out the way and needed help the LAC and my advisor were there for me.

My limitations have been the stepping stone I needed to move forward. I plan to go back to school and take a writing course. The smartest person in the world is the person who knows that he/she does not know everything. It's ok to ask for help.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY

Much has changed since our hospitality project. The most radical hospitality that has been implemented in our church is our new welcoming song. As stated earlier this song has caused a shift in our ministry that I never dreamed possible. The veil has been lifted between the ushers and the international guests. During the song the congregation, including the ushers and leaders go through the church singing and dancing as we celebrate the presence of our guests. I completed a four-week series on hospitality, taught a six-week class, and we visited to churches, but most impactful was the “Welcome to Antioch Baptist Church” song. Our musician, Minister Darren Jenkins, and director, Carlton Taylor, wrote the lyrics and our musicians created the music.<sup>1</sup>

The members young and old, male and female, enjoy singing and dancing to this song because we do it as a body. Repetition has caused us to implementing it as a practice. It is a song that we can embrace and it has become a part of the fabric of Antioch and how we treat one another. This song has allowed every generation to take

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix G for the lyrics to the song “Welcome to Antioch.”

part in welcoming each other. Our youth ministry participates with the pom-poms and flags. Our seniors are engaged because this song gets even those with physical challenges moving. Our music ministry got the message of hospitality and implemented this song in a spirit of excellence.

Recently, Antioch hosted the United Missionary Baptist Association (UMBA). UMBA is a fellowship that consists of churches in Manhattan, Bronx, and Westchester. The first night I was responsible for welcoming our guests. I asked every member to be present. This was not a service of Antioch but we were hosting the event. After I gave my welcome address I said to the congregation that, "Antioch likes to make sure you feel welcome." The music started playing and people in our ministry came from all over to welcome our guests. The kids were using their pom-poms people were singing, the congregation along with the seniors were fully engaged in making our guest feel at home. The Moderator Rev. Dr. Anthony Lowe of UMBA stated they never had a welcome like that before. Our guests were crying because the hugs and greetings they received were amazing.

Radical hospitality has become infectious in our ministry. People outside of Antioch are saying that my ministerial team has taken on the spirit of their pastor. They are welcoming and amiable. Recently they hosted the ministers of UMBA and the ministerial team introduced them to something different. I have encouraged Antioch not just to leave it with the welcome song but we must continue to put what the spirit of excellence is as share Gospel Hospitality.

I did not want the theme, "The Year of the Neighbor" to be a one-year event therefore, we continue to remind ourselves to love our neighbors. We are looking at our

neighbors differently. We are no longer relegating visitors to the back but we are now bringing them closer to the front and incorporating them within the congregation. We are communicating with our guests in a more positive way. In addition to transformed lives of adults, the youth here at Antioch are also taking on a welcoming attitude. We are making an impact on people who do not come to church. Recently we had a funeral and even though there was no connection to the family our members, youth and adults were tired from a previous event the day before yet they stayed, understanding that this family had a need and the ramification their hospitality would have on the family. We have become accountable to each other and through the teachings members are receptive when corrected with the acronym E.M.B.R.A.C.E.

During a meeting with my ministerial team Minister Lakisha Williams stated:

We must understand that training is essential and must be ongoing in ministry. Training across the board should be a part of the life blood of this ministry. In the same way we receive a guest preacher we have to make sure that we greet each other and the stranger with a welcoming spirit. The spirit of hospitality should not be relegated to what ministries do in the back with folds who come in. They need to see the bigger picture. This gift called hospitality is a part of what our walk is, and that is for all of us.

### **Personal Journey**

This has been a long journey with many personal challenges that sometimes prevented me from being present. It took a lot of prayer as my faith was constantly stretched. The LAC and I were pleased with the outcome of the project. Through the teaching and preaching the congregation at large have become intentional about hospitality.

Each ministry at Antioch has been stretched. This project started out as a reflection on the ushers. Today transformation has taken place throughout the congregation. Recently there was a review from one of our international guests:

Since I'm very thankful that they have allowed us to witness the Mass, it was an unforgettable experience. While we stood on the line to get into Mass the parishioners arrived with impeccable clothes, as if they were at a party. Once inside, tourists can be placed on chairs that are in a back room of the temple and is forbidden to take photos. It's amazing climate of respect, all that environment spirituality that is experienced at Mass gospel, songs, their energy, their wonderful voices.

There is still more work to be done but God has truly transformed the heart of Antioch to go deeper. There is a different kind of freedom where I believe all feel welcome. So, I can say, "Welcome to the church that God built!"

## APPENDIX A

## Focus Group Consent Form

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|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Researcher:</b>  | Shon T. Adkins, Drew University Doctorate of Ministry Candidate |
| <b>Study Title:</b> | Enhancing A Culture of Welcoming @ the Church with a Big Heart. |
| <b>Institution:</b> | Drew University, Theological School                             |

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**1. WHAT IS THIS FORM?**

This form is called a Consent Form. It will give you information about the study so you can make an informed decision about participation in this research. This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate and any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to take some time to think this over and ask questions now and at any other time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and you will be given a copy for your records.

**2. WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE?**

*Any male or female at least 18 years old can participate.*

**3. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?**

The purpose of this research study is to explore how practices of marginalization inhibit evangelism.

**4. WHERE WILL THE STUDY TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?**

This focus group will be conducted at Grant Chapel AME Church as a 90-minute group session.

**5. WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?**

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 90-minute focus group where we will discuss experiences surrounding topics like inclusion/exclusion within the church community, evangelism and other relevant topics. During the session you will be asked a series of group interview questions where you will have an opportunity to share your thoughts/opinions. You may skip any question you feel uncomfortable answering.

**6. WHAT ARE MY BENEFITS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope through your participation we can learn more about how marginalization in the church community can impact evangelism.

**7. WHAT ARE MY RISKS OF BEING IN THIS STUDY?**

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, a possible inconvenience may be the time it takes to complete the study.

**8. HOW WILL MY PERSONAL INFORMATION BE PROTECTED?**

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

**9. WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I wish regarding this evaluation. If I have any additional questions about the evaluation, I may call Shon Adkins @ XXX-XXXX.

**10. SUBJECT STATEMENT OF VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

When signing this form, I am agreeing to voluntarily enter this study. I have had a chance to read this consent form, and it was explained to me in a language which I use and understand. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. A copy of this signed Informed Consent Form has been given to me.”

**I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.**

**If you cannot agree to the above stipulation please see the researcher(s) as you may be ineligible to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

*By signing below, I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person  
DMin Student

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

## APPENDIX B

## Letter to the LAC

November 20, 2016

Grace and Peace:

I would like to take this time to thank you for your willingness to be a part of the Lay Advisory Committee. This committee will require you to assist in preparing my research on hospitality in the Christian church. The project will last for 6 weeks starting mid-January. It will consist of developing a Focus Group, implementing a pre and post survey, a six-week midweek classes around hospitality, and a visit to 2-3 churches within the New York City area. Your role is critical to the success of the project as you will provide important insight and feedback to help shape the project.

The topic of hospitality in the Christian community has been stirring in my heart as our mantra is *“The Church with a Big Heart.”* I am excited that as a church we will be able to delve into the impact of hospitality and explore Jesus’s model of hospitality through his narrative of love.

I Peter 4:9 says, “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”

Our ability to be more like Christ by showing love to everyone is important. Once again, thank you for your willingness to participate.

Sincerely,

Rev. Shon T. Adkins  
DMin Student

## APPENDIX C

### Focus Group Questions

1. What is hospitality?
2. What is the culture of Antioch?
3. What needs to stop?
4. What needs to be implemented?
5. What needs to continue?

## APPENDIX D

### Pre and Post Survey Questions

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been a member of Antioch?
3. How would you define hospitality?
4. How many people or families have you invited to visit or join Antioch in the past year?
5. What message do people receive from the interactions they have with those they meet upon entering Antioch, in the hallways and in the sanctuary?
6. Do visitors to Antioch fee an immediate acceptance or a conditional acceptance from those they encounter?
7. Do you think you have ever made someone feel unwelcome in Antioch by something you said or did even if by accident?
8. Have you ever seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome?
9. Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to display hospitality within our ministry?
10. Are members of Antioch prepared to welcome guests?

## APPENDIX E

## Summary of the Responses

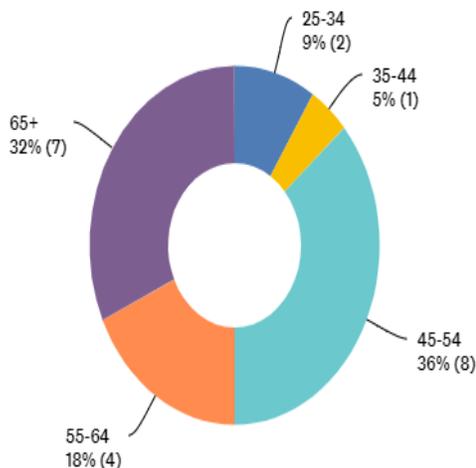
**First Survey Date:** 1/29/2017 to 2/12/2017

**About the Participants:**

To be able to understand the responses of this survey which lasted from 1/29/2017 to 2/12/2017, we start by looking at the age groups that participated in the survey and how long they have been members of Antioch Baptist Church.

What is your age?

Answered: 22 Skipped: 1



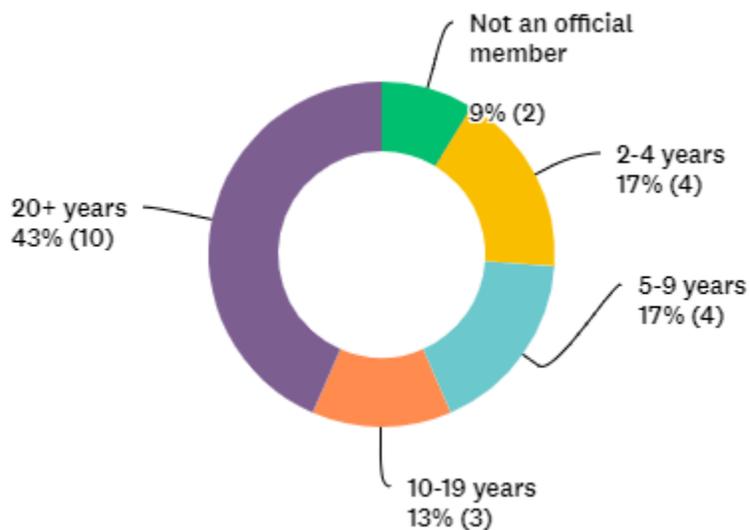
**Fig. 1.** The age group of the participants of this survey.

It can be seen from Fig. 1 that majority (86%) of the participants of the survey are age 45 or older, and the remaining percentage (14%) are shared between age group 35-44 (5%) and young adults 25-34 (9%). No member of the congregation below the age of 25 participated in this survey. Hence the responses in this survey reflect the opinion of the older members of the congregation.

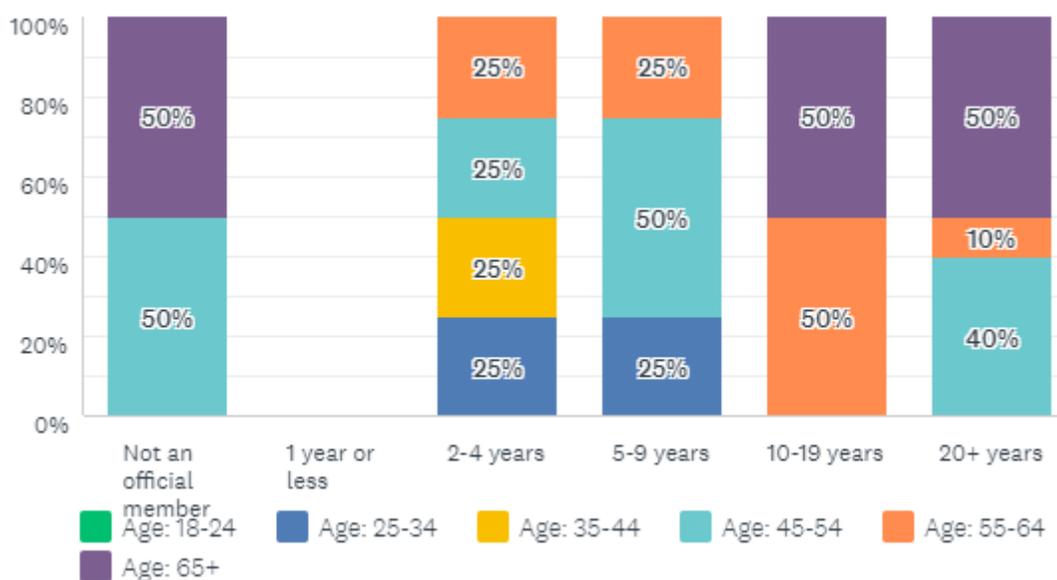
In Fig. 2, We see that majority (43%) of the respondents have spent 20 years and above in the church, and 9% of the responses came from participants that are not official members of the church.

To see how the membership duration of Fig. 2 relates to the age of the participants, Fig. 3 is used. As can be seen in Fig. 3, the participants who have spent 10 years or more in the

church mainly consists of members of age group 45 years and above (this is deduced from the last two bars of Fig. 3). This is somewhat expected.



**Fig. 2.** How long the participant have been members of Antioch Baptist Church.



**Fig. 3.** Comparing the age of the participants and how long they have been a member.

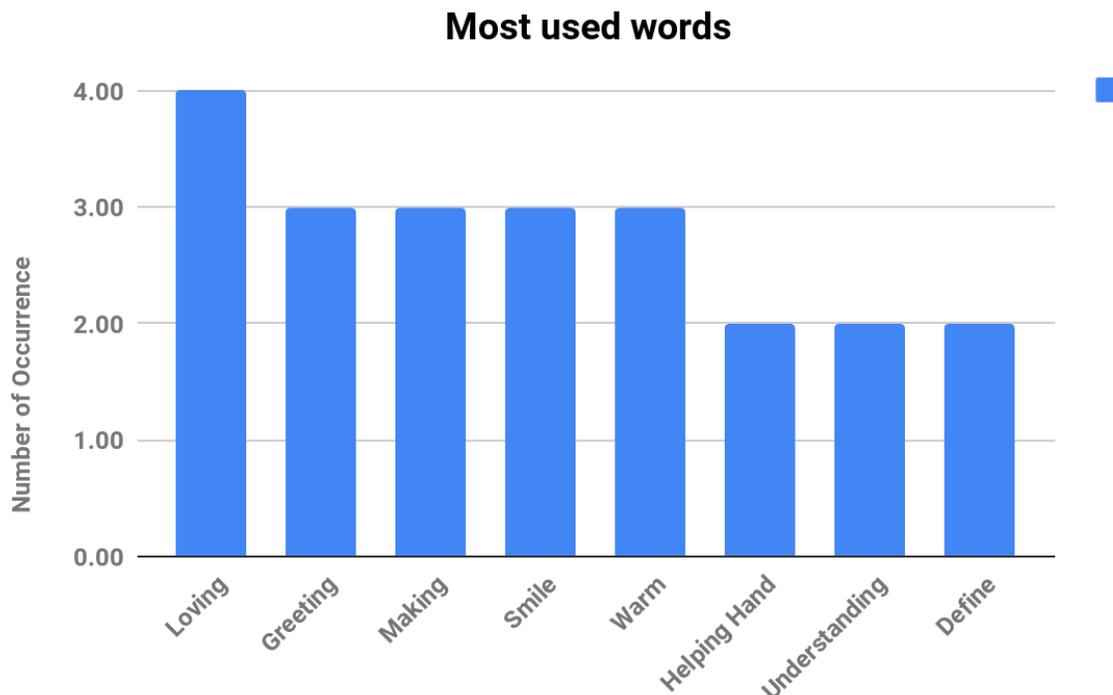
### Survey questions and the summary of the answers

In this section, we would summarize the responses of the participants to the questions found in the survey.

#### a) How would you define hospitality?

As seen in Fig 4., to summarize the answers given by the respondents to this question, we analyze the most frequent words/phrases found in the responses. The keywords found in the responses to these question include, showing **love** to both members and visitors, being **understanding**, **greeting** visitors/members, **making**

someone feel welcome, putting up a good **smile** at all times especially while greeting someone, giving a **warm**, friendly reception to visitors and guest, and lastly offering a **helping hand** when someone is in need.

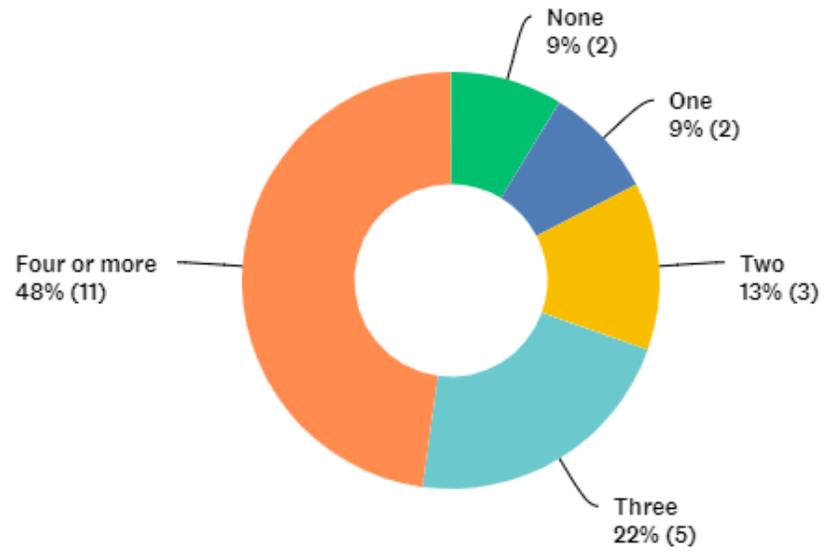


**Fig. 4.** Most used words/phrases found in the responses given by the participants for the definition Hospitality.

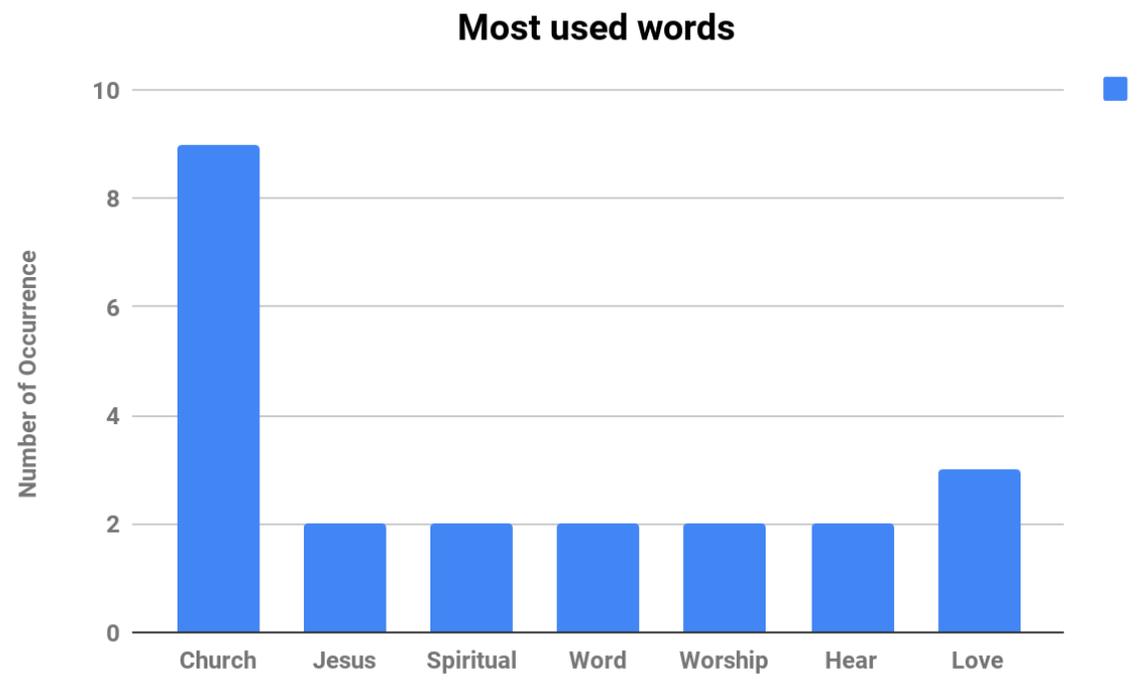
- b) How many people or families have you invited to visit or join Antioch in the past year?

From Fig. 5, it can be seen that majority (i.e., 70%) of the participants of this survey have invited 3 or more new families or people to join Antioch in the past year.

And for the reason why these participants invited these new families/people, Fig. 6 shows the keywords/phrases that appeared in their responses. Hence, they invited these visitors so they can **hear** the word of **God**, because the visitors do not have a **church** home or asked to visit the **church**, because Antioch is a place of **love** and they (the participants) would want the visitors to experience both how we **worship** as a church, and the **love** of **Jesus** Christ. Finally, the participants wanted to share their **spiritual** experience with the visitors.



**Fig. 5.** Responses to the Number of People Invited by the Participants.



**Fig. 6.** Keywords found in the Question: What was your reason for inviting a visitor to the church?

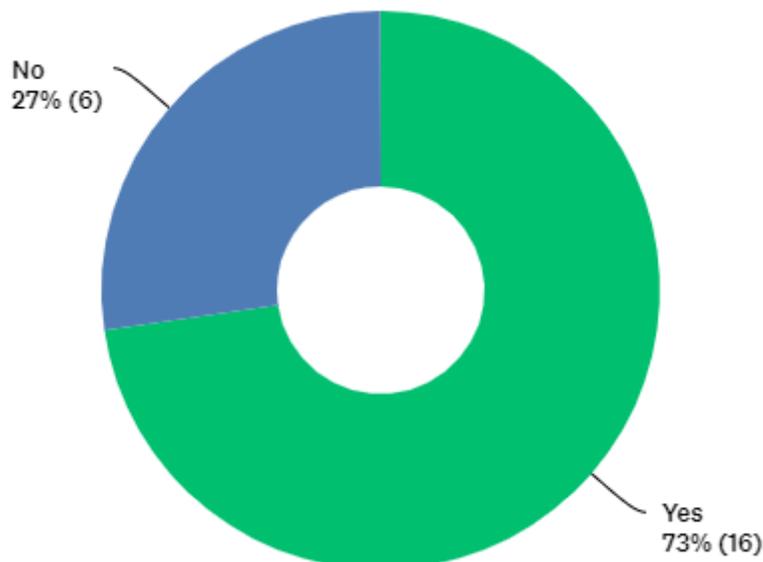
c) What message do people receive from the interactions they have with those they meet upon entering Antioch, in the hallways and the sanctuary?

For this question, most (69%) of the respondents believe the visitors received a warm welcome while they are being led to their seat. The remaining 31% believes

that the visitors receive a mixed message which is mostly unpleasant and apprehension.

- d) Do visitors to Antioch feel an immediate acceptance or a conditional acceptance from those they encounter?

As can be seen in Fig. 7, though 73% of the respondents believe that visitors receive immediate acceptance, 27% believe that they don't. But on looking at all the comments given by the respondents on this question, I discovered that 47% of the respondents believe that it depends on who the visitors meet.

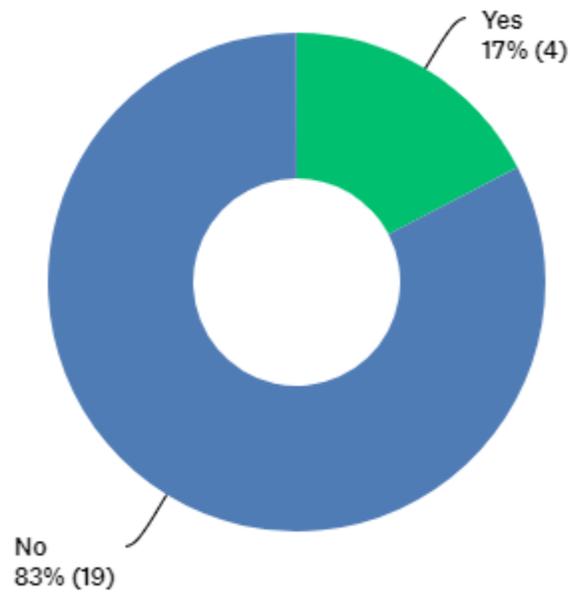


**Fig. 7.** The number of people that believe visitors feel an immediate acceptance from those they encounter.

- e) Do you think you have ever made someone feel unwelcome in Antioch by something you said or did, even if by accident?

From Fig. 8, we see that 83% of the respondents said they have never made someone feel welcome, while 17% believe they have made someone feel unwelcome.

An interesting thing to note is that though majority of the responders (83%) believe that they have not made any visitor feel unwelcome (Fig. 8), 70% of the respondents agreed that they have seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome.



**Fig. 8.** Answer to “have you ever made someone feel unwelcome?”.

- f) Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to display hospitality within our ministry?

Here, all but one of the respondents believe that it is the job of the following: Pastor/Ministers, Greeters, Church Leaders, Members, and Ushers.

- g) Are members of Antioch prepared to welcome guests?

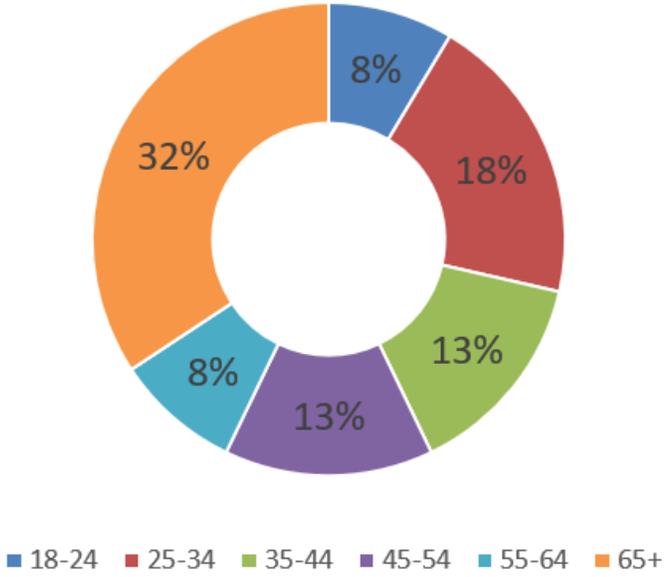
17% of the respondents believe that the members of Antioch Baptist church are not yet prepared, while, the remaining 83% believe the members are ready.

**Second Survey Date:** 4/23/2017 to 4/30/2018

This survey would be compared to the one done above.

**About the Participants:**

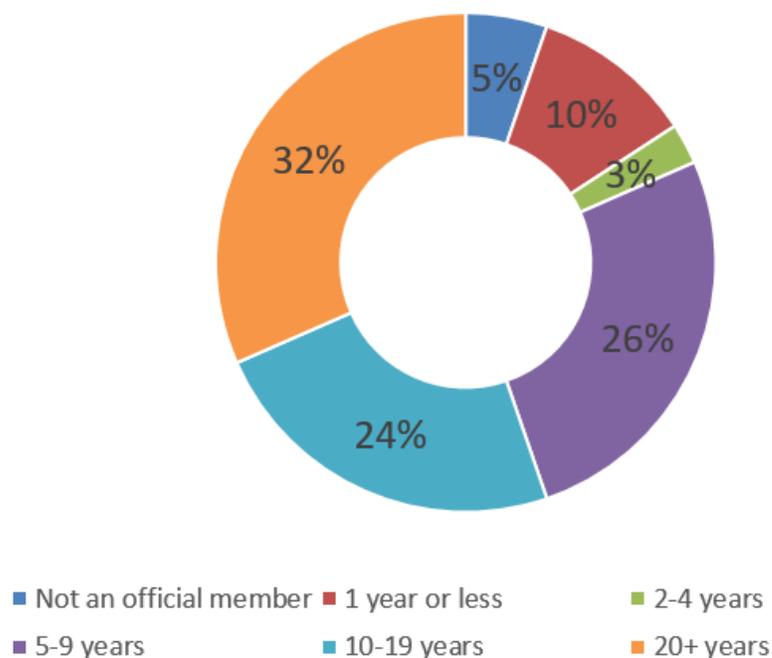
To be able to understand the responses of this survey which lasted from 4/23/2017 to 4/30/2017, we start by looking at the age groups that participated in the survey and how long they have been members of Antioch Baptist Church.



**Fig. 9.** The age group of the participants of this survey.

Referring to Fig. 9 above, we see that this survey was completed by a good number of young adults (aged 34 and below occupying a total of 26%) when compared to survey 1 (Fig. 1) which had only 2%. The percentage of the elderly members of the church in this survey remained the same as that of survey 1.

In Fig. 10, we see that majority (32%) of the respondents have spent 20 years and above in the church, and 5% of the responses came from participants that are not official members of the church. Hence, when compared to Fig. 2, majority of those that completed both surveys (1 and 2) have spent 20 years and above in the church.



**Fig. 10.** How long the participant have been members of Antioch Baptist Church.

### Survey questions and the summary of the answers

In this section, we would summarize the responses of the participants to the questions found in the survey.

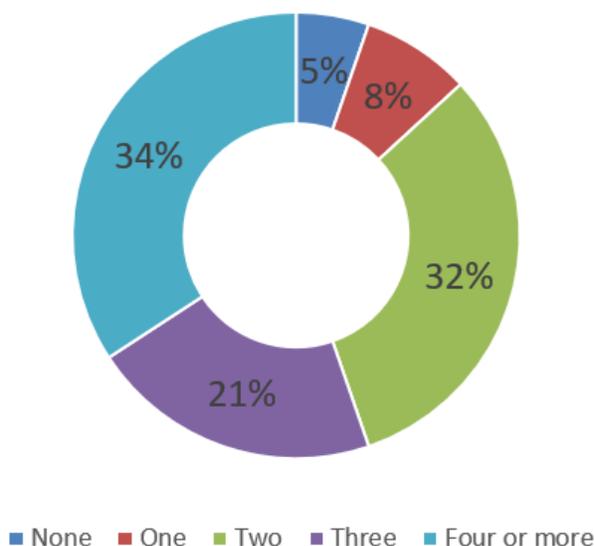
#### a) How would you define hospitality?

To define hospitality, the following phrases/words were found in majority of the definitions given by the respondents: **love** and **Radical Hospitality**. It can be seen by referring to Fig. 4 that respondents of both surveys agree that love is one of the keywords involved in hospitality.

#### b) How many people or families have you invited to visit or join Antioch in the past year?

From Fig. 12, it can be seen that majority (i.e., 55%) of the participants of this survey have invited 3 or more new families or people to join Antioch in the past year as compared to 70% of survey 1.

The keywords found in the reason given by survey participants on why they invited or invite a visitor to Antioch Baptist church contained the following key phrases/words: **word**, **worship**, and **church**. These three (3) phrases/words can be found in the same definitions given by the participants of the initial survey (as can be seen from Fig. 6 of survey 1).



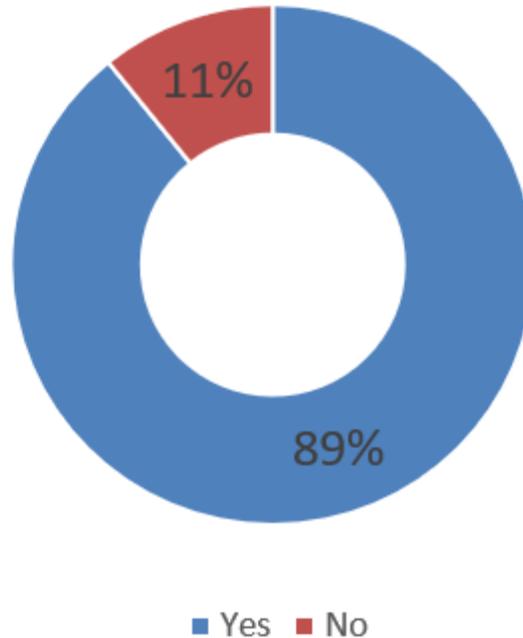
**Fig. 12.** Responses to the Number of People Invited by the Participants.

**c) What message do people receive from the interactions they have with those they meet upon entering Antioch, in the hallways and in the sanctuary?**

For this question, most (95%) of the respondents believe the visitors received a warm welcome while they are being led to their seat. The remaining 5% believes that the visitors receive a mixed message which is mostly unpleasant and apprehension. This 95% stated above represent an improvement of 26% from the 69% stated in survey 1.

**d) Do visitors to Antioch feel an immediate acceptance or a conditional acceptance from those they encounter?**

As can be seen in Fig. 13, though 89% of the respondents believe that visitors receive immediate acceptance, 11% believe that they don't. But on looking at all the comments given by the respondents of survey 1 and those of this survey, both respondents (47% of survey 1 and 33% of survey 2) believe that it depends on who the visitors encounter.

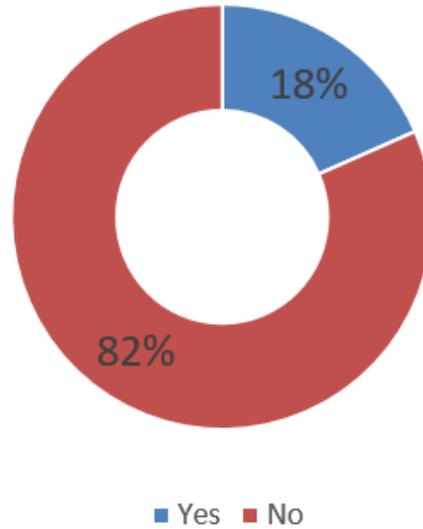


**Fig. 13.** The number of people that believe visitors feel an immediate acceptance from those they encounter.

e) **Do you think you have ever made someone feel unwelcome in Antioch by something you said or did, even if by accident?**

From Fig. 14, we see that 82% of the respondents said they have never made someone feel welcome, while 18% believe they have made someone feel unwelcome.

An interesting thing to note is that though majority of the responders (82%) believe that they have not made any visitor feel unwelcome (Fig. 14), 78% of the respondents agreed that they have seen someone say or do something to make another person feel unwelcome.



**Fig. 14.** Answer to “have you ever made someone feel unwelcome?”.

**f) Whose primary responsibility do you think it is to display hospitality within our ministry?**

Here, all but one of the respondents believe that it is the job of the following: Pastor/Ministers, Greeters, Church Leaders, Members and Ushers.

**g) Are members of Antioch prepared to welcome guests?**

18% of the respondents believe that the members of Antioch Baptist church are not yet prepared, while, the remaining 82% believe the members are ready.

## APPENDIX F

### Bible Study Outline

The bible study classes were held on Wednesdays at one o'clock p.m. and seven o'clock p.m. I taught on hospitality for six weeks. Each class was taught for one hour. Both classes were held in the fellowship hall usually with a meal. I had to push back the initial class a week once we incorporated a Focus Group for the seniors.

**Week One:** What is Hospitality?

The purpose of this class was to define hospitality and explore examples of old and new testament biblical hospitality. People shared their experiences of hospitality and how we can build a loving Christian community that is welcoming to all.

**Week Two:** Who is My Neighbor? Luke 10:25-37

The objective of this class was to define who is our neighbor based on the parable of the Good Samaritan.

**Week Three: The Hospitality Commands – Hebrews 13:1**

This class asks the question, What does hospitality command?

**Week Four: What is Radical Hospitality?**

The objective of this lesson was to explore the biblical definition of hospitality. During this class we discussed Robert Schnase's book, *Five Practices to Radical Hospitality*.

**Week Five: Hospitality vs. Customer Service**

The objective of this class was to ask the question are there any similarities between hospitality and customer service. What does it mean to provide excellence in ministry?

**Week Six: Where do we go From Here?**

The objective of this lesson is to explore new ways of being that will make a mark that will never be erased. In this class I introduced the acronym for E.M.B.R.A.C.E. as a hospitality model for us to follow within our church community and our ministries.

## APPENDIX G

## Welcome to Antioch

We welcome you to Antioch where love overflows

We spread the love of Jesus Christ so all the world will know

That all are welcome

Yes, you are welcome

To lift your hands and bless His holy Name

Lay down your burdens

Here at the altar

We welcome you to the Antioch Baptist Church

Let me hear you say (Lead)

A, B, C

Lift your voice and say (Lead)

A, B, C

Lift your hands and say (Lead)

A, B, C

Let me hear you say (Lead)

A, B, C

Welcome to Antioch, Welcome to Antioch, Welcome to Antioch, Welcome to the  
Antioch Baptist Church

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